EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SUMMARY

This issue of Constellis’ Kidnap for Ransom Insight Report covers global kidnapping incidents and trends for the months of November and December 2019, as well as January 2020. The information is derived from multi-source analysis of kidnap for ransom activity and where known, the outcome or resolution of the events. The report covers current kidnap for ransom hotspots at regional, national and provincial levels, with a particular focus on areas where kidnap for ransom activity is increasing.

Statistical analysis of data for November and December 2019 is included on page 13, which displays kidnap for ransom trends by region, victims by nationality and employment sector, as well as identifying the Top 10 countries for kidnapping of foreign nationals over the reporting period. Additionally, statistical information for 2019 can be found on page 17.

The Global Piracy Update gives an overview of the piracy threat by region, providing trend analysis for November and December 2019. It also offers sample cases that took place during those months to illustrate identified trends.

The Cybersecurity section examines current issues affecting companies and individuals in the realm of IT security. This edition will provide an overview of State-sponsored cyberwarfare, a growing phenomenon in the global cyber landscape, comprising an increasing proportion of all cyber-attacks year on year. As a subversive means by which nation states can target their foes, the motivations behind state-sponsored cybercrime can be numerous, ranging from degrading an opponent’s military capabilities to financial gain. Following the recent killing of leading Iranian military commander Qassem Suleimani by the US, and with tensions increasing in the Middle East as a consequence, this article will focus on the threat of Iranian state-sponsored cyberwarfare.

The Focus Article examines aspects of effective crisis communication and its vital role in crisis management. A central tenet of effective crisis response is the management of information and communications. This has become even more important since the development and widespread use of social media networks. Even if the operational management of the crisis is well executed, poor communication can prove catastrophic for the reputation of an organisation. However, the reverse is also true: poor crisis management can be salvaged by good crisis communication.

January
2020 REPORT

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GLOBAL OVERVIEW

AMERICAS

The Americas accounted for less than 10% of all foreign kidnap victims recorded by Constellis over November and December 2019. As a continuation of a trend observed over the previous two-month period, reports of mass kidnappings of migrants in Mexico continued to decrease, amid increasing entry restrictions by the Mexican authorities. This trend may see a reversal in the coming months as new migrant ‘caravans’ from Central America have been announced, increasing the number of possible targets and fuelling human trafficking, which is closely linked to kidnapping activities. In contrast to the decreasing number of migrants kidnapped in the country over the last two months of 2019, Mexico recorded the highest rates of violent crime in its recent history. With over 35,500 homicides and over 2,000 kidnappings reported to the authorities last year, Mexico has surpassed murder levels recorded by El Salvador and has consolidated its position as one of the top five kidnapping hotspots in the world. Mexico’s security environment is not expected to see an improvement over 2020, given the absence of a clear security strategy and with a significant proportion of security resources diverted from the fight against organised crime to securing the southern border. This situation is exacerbated by poor economic performance and continuing criminal fragmentation.

CASES:

- On the morning of 24 November, a Mexican actor and a French expatriate were kidnapped by a group of armed men in a town in the state of Mexico. The group ambushed and forced out of the cars. The incident was confirmed to store and sell drugs, attacking all its occupants. It was immediately contacted by the kidnappers, who demanded a ransom in foreign currency.

The Mexican authorities confirmed there had been a ransom demand though did not specify if any payment was made. The family of the Mexican actor later stated that MXP 30,000 (approximately USD 1,600) had been paid for his release, considerably less than the MXP 150,000 (around USD 8,000) originally demanded. According to the local press, the same amount was paid for the release of the French national. Local authorities said that judging by the low ransom demanded, the criminal group who abducted the two men was not a kidnap gang nor part of a cartel, but likely a group who initially only wanted to steal the men’s vehicles.

- Mexican national Diego Quintero Fregozo remains missing since his kidnapping in the locality of Salem, North Carolina, on 16 December. According to reports, he was abducted by a group of armed men who robbed the property he was in, a house believed to be used to store and sell drugs, attacking all its occupants. It is unknown why only Quintero was taken. The North Carolina authorities have liaised with the Mexican authorities in order to locate any relatives of the missing person.

In Colombia, kidnapping continued its downward trend in 2019, with only 88 incidents recorded by the Colombian authorities. This figure represents a decrease of 49% with respect to the number of incidents reported in 2018, and the lowest since 1984. The authorities attributed the reduction to an effective security strategy targeting organised crime across the country, which has resulted in the near eradication of networks specialised in kidnapping. It has been noted however that residual kidnapping activity in the country is now largely dominated by FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia–Rebels) and the ELN (National Liberation Army). These groups have not only filled the criminal vacuum, but have also increased their criminal activities (particularly kidnapping and extortion) as part of their insurgent strategy. The region most affected by kidnapping in 2019 was Norte de Santander, followed by Cauca and Arauca. Colombian militant groups have particularly benefited from the porosity of the border with Venezuela, which facilitates passage to their safe havens in the neighbouring country, also hindering Colombian law enforcement. Elsewhere in South America, Venezuelan criminality continues to expand. This has been particularly the case in Peru, where the authorities announced in January 2020 the creation of a specialised police unit to combat crimes perpetrated by foreign nationals and an increase in border and migration controls, in the context of a significant increase in the number of crimes committed by Venezuelans.

CASES:

- Five people held by the ELN were released by the Colombian Armed Forces in separate operations in the departments of Antioquia, Chocó and Arauca, western Colombia, between 24 and 25 December 2019. One of the victims was identified as businesswoman Diana Toro, who was kidnapped on 27 September 2018 in Antioquia. According to press reports, Toro was initially taken by members of local gang ‘Los Hechiceros’, who then handed her over to the ELN for a payment of COP 48 million (USD 14,500). The ELN later allegedly demanded COP 3 billion (USD 907,000) in ransom from Toro’s family. The other released hostage was businessman Octavio Sánchez Correa, abducted on 1 March 2019 near an indigenous reserve in Chocó department. According to the government, all victims were released as a result of military pressure on the militant group.

- On 13 January 2020, Peruvian police carried out a raid on a hotel in the Lima district of Punta Negra. The operation resulted in the arrest of 124 individuals, including 114 Venezuelan nationals and three Colombians, suspected to be members of an organised criminal gang specialised in kidnapping, extortion and drug trafficking.

- Syrian businessman Tamam Alchaer was kidnapped on 6 January 2020 on his way home in Cabudare, in Venezuela’s Lara state. The businessman’s family was immediately contacted by the kidnappers, who demanded a ransom in foreign currency.

Communications however ceased on 8 January for unknown reasons. The body of the trader was later found on 17 January, with a gunshot to the head and partially burnt, on a highway near the city of Barquisimeto. The authorities determined that the man had been dead for about four days. After his murder, it transpired that Alchaer had been subjected to extortion attempts for months and had constantly received threats. Investigations are ongoing.

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Europe accounted for a small fraction of Constellis’ kidnap records for November-December 2019, with only two foreign victims registered in this period. This considerable reduction was linked to a lack in reporting of mass rescues of kidnapped migrants in the region, which is particularly common in countries of entry, such as Greece and Spain. Although violent crime, particularly that involving knives and guns, is perceived to be growing across major European cities, traditional kidnapping remains a rare occurrence, primarily due to the effectiveness of their security apparatuses. Having said that, lower-cost varieties of this crime, such as express and virtual kidnappings, seem to be on the rise.

In its 2019 cybercrime report, the European Union’s law enforcement agency said that ransomware remains the top cybercrime threat to the EU. Although observing a decreasing trend in the number of attacks registered, EUROPOL confirmed an increase in the magnitude of the attacks and ransoms demanded – and obtained. Moreover, the report identified concerns over government and critical infrastructure increasingly becoming victims of ransomware attacks, both by criminally-motivated cyber criminals and state-sponsored actors. Spain, for instance, recorded 36 cyberattacks considered ‘critical’ (targeting critical infrastructure or lasting over 1,000 hours) between January and November 2019. According to the Spanish authorities, at least 20 of these were believed to have been perpetrated by state-sponsored actors. While cryptocurrencies are the primary payment method in cybercrime, particularly ransomware, their use has increasingly been reported in more ‘traditional’ crimes, such as kidnapping for ransom and extortion. While demands initially made in Bitcoin were recorded only in high-profile cases, they are now increasingly being reported in lower-level incidents.

CASES:

- On 3 December, British police thwarted the abduction of a six-year-old Portuguese child who was on vacation with his parents in London. According to reports, the abduction occurred when the Portuguese family was visiting an art gallery. The kidnapper took advantage of the parents’ distraction and snatched the child. The parents quickly alerted police officers in the area, who managed to intercept the man with the boy on the street. Investigations are currently ongoing in order to determine the motives behind the kidnapping.

- On 19 December, Portuguese Judicial Police arrested two men for their alleged participation in an express kidnapping in Lisbon in November. According to police reports, the men forced the victim inside their vehicle, assaulted him and forced him to hand over his bank cards along with their PINs. After making several ATM withdrawals, the suspects continued beating the man in a street. He was rescued by passers-by who later took him to hospital due to the severity of his injuries. The authorities said that investigations in the case were ongoing to determine the participation of the group in other similar cases in the city.

- In early January, an elderly woman in Madrid, Spain, received a call from a man who claimed to have kidnapped her daughter. The caller demanded €10,000 for the release of the victim and threatened to start cutting off the hostage’s fingers if the payment was not made as soon as possible. Alarmed, the woman told her husband to call the police whilst she went to the nearest bank. Upon receiving the report, police officers were able to intercept the woman before she was able to make the transfer. Meanwhile, the daughter was located safe at work. The Spanish National Police have warned all those residing in Spain about such scams, which are commonly carried out by experienced criminal gangs. According to the Spanish authorities, 130 cases of virtual kidnapping were detected in the country in 2019, most of them occurring in Madrid, Cantabria, Zaragoza and Valencia.

- On 2 November, an anonymous message was sent to Russian Railways in St. Petersburg, threatening to bomb train stations with drones if 50 bitcoins (approximately USD 455,000) were not transferred to several e-wallets. As soon as the threat was reported, police deployed to five major train stations and 180 railway stations, as well as to Pulkovo Airport and the Marine Station, though they did not find any evidence of any imminent threat. The deadline for payment passed on 5 November but no attacks were reported. Investigations continued to identify the extortionists.
**Middle East**

In the last two months of 2019, the Middle East saw an increase in the number of kidnapped foreigners. Most incidents over the reporting period were linked to the crises involving Iran and its proxies in the region. As tensions increased after the US withdrawal from the nuclear deal and re-impositions of sanctions on Iran in May 2019, Iran emerged as the top regional detention hotspot for foreign nationals, accounting for 60% of all victims recorded by Constellis in the Middle East over 2019. This was followed by Yemen, where the Iranian-proxy Ansarullah (the Houthis) was responsible for the kidnap or detention of at least 18 foreign nationals in the same year.

Tension escalated in early 2020, following a series of high-profile events in Iraq, including the death of an American subcontractor in an attack by a pro-Iranian group and the subsequent killing of Qassem Suleimani – the second most important figure in Iran – in a US drone strike. As Iran vowed retaliation and anti-Western sentiment increased across the region, US citizens and those linked to US interests and allies are assessed to be at a heightened risk in Iran, Iraq and other countries with a strong Iranian influence or presence of Iranian proxies. This includes a risk of abduction and detention, as many of these groups have been blamed in the past for the kidnapping of foreigners for the advancement of their political agendas.

**Cases:**

- Two French journalists were kidnapped during an attack on the US Embassy in Baghdad, Iraq, on 1 January, according to Kurdish news outlets. The unnamed victims were allegedly taken to an unknown destination inside an emergency vehicle belonging to the Iranian-linked Kala’ib Hezbollah (KH) militia. They were released the next morning, reportedly after pressure from caretaker Iraqi Prime Minister Adil Abdul Mahdi, and Falih al-Fayyadh, National Security Advisor and chief of the Hashd al-Shaabi militias, also known as the Popular Mobilization Units (PMUs). In a statement on 2 January, the Prime Minister’s office confirmed both the abduction and release of the French nationals. Meanwhile, the French government refused to comment when asked about the incident.

- On 17 November, Houthi rebels seized three ships three miles off Yemen’s Uqban Island, including two South Korean vessels – a tugboat and a sand dredger – and a Saudi Arabian craft. The vessels’ 16 crew members were also held in detention, accused of illegal entry into the country’s territorial waters. Soon after, the South Korean government confirmed the event; additionally stating that two Korean nationals were among the detained. The sailors were reportedly released on 19 November. Hussein al-Azizi, the Houthi deputy foreign minister, said the release resulted from friendly ties between Seoul and Sanaa, and after a Houthi investigation found the ships had entered Yemeni waters due to bad weather.

- Three Iranian dual nationals were arrested on 19 November during unrest in the city of Karaj, Alborz province, part of a series of demonstrations recorded across Iran over a petrol price hike. The detainees included a German, a Turkish and an Afghan passport holder, who are accused of “having been trained and funded by foreign services to carry out operations for destroying infrastructure and stirring up civil disobedience” in Iran. Their names have not been released.

- On 2 December, a local businessman was kidnapped on the Al-Bireh Road in Lebanon’s Bekaa region. On the same day, the kidnappers contacted the man’s family and requested a ransom of USD 1 million for his release. The relatives reported the incident to the police, who immediately initiated a search operation.

- At least 100 people, including minors, were arrested in mid-January by Lebanese authorities during violent anti-government protests in Beirut. Reportedly, most detainees were released soon after, with the exception of seven foreigners – six Syrians and one Egyptian – who will be put on trial. It is not clear what the charges laid against them are. This incident preceded the arrest of an American journalist in Beirut on 19 January. Nicholas Frakes was accused of livestreaming footage of anti-government protests to an Israeli news outlet — a serious crime under Lebanese law. The journalist was finally released on 21 January, following interrogation by military intelligence dealing with investigations of illegal contacts with Israel.

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- Investigations determined that the businessman had been kidnapped by a gang comprised of five Syrian nationals, who kept him hostage in a rented house in the town of Al-Marj-Bekaa. At dawn on 3 December, the authorities carried out a series of raids in the area, rescuing the victim and arresting all those involved in the kidnapping.

- On 16 December, relief agency Gift of the Givers announced that South African photojournalist Shiraaz Mohamed had escaped from his captors after three years in captivity. According to the sources of the information, individuals who were friendly with Mohamed assisted him following his escape and handed him over to Turkish intelligence officials. Gift of the Givers claimed to have photos of the journalist allegedly taken following his escape. This statement was not confirmed by Mohamed’s family at the time, while South Africa’s foreign affairs department (DIRCO) said it was still working to “negotiate” Mohamed’s release. Mohamed’s whereabouts were unknown to the public until 3 January, when his family announced he had returned to South Africa. Shiraaz Mohamed was abducted in Darkoush, Syria, on January 2017. His captors had demanded USD 1.5 million in ransom, and provided a series of proofs of life, the latest released in August 2019. The identity of the kidnappers has not been ascertained.

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Over November-December 2019, Africa was the region with the highest number of kidnapped foreign nationals, with 60% of all recorded victims. The number of foreign victims over this period was the largest recorded in any two-month period over the past two years. This significant increase coincided with a spike in piracy off the Gulf of Guinea, brought about by the improvement of weather conditions at the end of the rainy season. Coupled with this, it is believed that Nigerian pirate action groups have begun emulating the tactics used by Gulf of Aden pirates; taking larger amounts of victims and further from the shore, with the use of motherships. Poor security infrastructure and corruption are two of the main factors perpetuating the ability of criminal groups across the region to carry out kidnapping. This is particularly evident in Nigeria, where the kidnap risk is among the highest in the world and where foreign nationals, perceived to be of higher ransom value, are actively targeted. The outlook of the country’s security environment is expected to worsen over 2020. An additional threat factor has emerged with the resurgence in mid-January of the Boko Haram splinter group Ansaru, claiming its first attack since 2013. Ansaru, widely regarded as Al Qaeda’s franchise in Nigeria and a close ally of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), is notorious for its high-profile kidnappings of foreign nationals, having killed at least ten of them.

**CASES:**

- On 12 January, the Chinese consulate in Lagos, Nigeria, announced the release of four Chinese sailors kidnapped in Gabon in December 2019. The statement did not provide details of their release, but according to Nigerian authorities, the men were released in a military operation on 9 January. The four victims had been seized by pirates in Libreville's harbour from two different vessels in what seemed to be a series of coordinated attacks on 22 December. This also included a raid on a third ship, whose captain was killed. A fourth attack reportedly took place in the same area the next day, though it was repelled.

- Three employees of a Lebanese engineering company, including two Lebanese nationals, were kidnapped on 9 December in Nigeria’s Niger state while carrying out a road construction project. According to reports, the workers were abducted along with a number of villagers by a group of gunmen believed to originate from the northern Kaduna state, who stormed Galadima Kogo village on 20 motorcycles. No updates have surfaced on the case. This was not the first such incident involving employees of this company. In March 2019, a Lebanese engineer was kidnapped and his driver killed in a road ambush in Kano State. The engineer was found dead after two days. This incident followed the kidnapping of a Syrian employee at a quarry site in Sokoto state in May 2018. The man was released after six days in captivity, presumably after a ransom was paid.

- Meanwhile, in Burkina Faso, three Burkinabé nationals and a Chinese expatriate working on a telecommunications project for a Chinese company, were reported missing after their vehicle was found abandoned in Cascades region on 22 November. The men were found safe near the town of Sidéraadougou on the night of 23-24 November. Burkinabé authorities did not share details of the event but claimed that no ransom had been paid. In mid-January 2020, the Burkina Faso police arrested four men suspected of having taken part in the kidnapping. One of them, a Burkinabé national, was identified as a member of a cell of the Macina Liberation Front (MLF).

- In Mozambique, after a wave of kidnappings that began in 2011 and peaked in 2013, cases had notably reduced in the past couple of years, associated with a series of arrests and convictions of kidnap kingpins. However, in what seems to be a resurgence, a number of incidents have been reported in recent months. As per previous trends, these recent incidents have targeted members of the South Asian community, particularly those in the business sector. Nonetheless, as seen in the past, other expatriates and wealthy locals of other ethnic backgrounds could also be at risk, should the situation deteriorate. While victims are mostly released safe after the payment of a ransom, captivity periods can surpass one month. Ransoms demanded are hefty, generally made in foreign currency, and commonly reach millions of dollars. Similarly, and perhaps linked, a few incidents have also been recorded in neighbouring Madagascar after a year’s hiatus, hinting at a possible resurgence of regional kidnapping syndicates.

**CASES:**

- The son of Indian businessman Jumode Lalgy, owner of one of the largest transport companies in Mozambique, was abducted on the morning of 28 November in Matola, one of the suburbs of the Mozambican capital. Unknown individuals intercepted Shilton Lalgy on his way home from the gym, forced him out of his car and drove him away in their own vehicle. According to local press, Juneide Lalgy has put up for sale a number of trucks valued at USD 3.5 million in order to pay for his son’s release, leading to speculation that the ransom may be in the range of USD 4 million. The victim remains in captivity at the time of writing. Less than two weeks into this incident, another Indian businessman was abducted by heavily armed men in the city of Beira, and a third on 13 January.

- An Indian businessman with French citizenship was kidnapped by a group of heavily-armed men on the morning of 13 December as he was leaving his home in the town of Soavimbahaoka in Madagascar. Navaze Veldjee was reportedly released on 18 December, following an alleged ransom payment of MGA 500 million (approximately USD 133,000). This was the second time Veldjee was kidnapped for ransom in the country. He was previously abducted in Antananarivo in May 2018, and released after 15 days in captivity following the payment of an undisclosed ransom.

- Meanwhile, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), mining companies and their employees continue to be a target for local militias. On 21 November, three Chinese nationals were kidnapped by suspected Raia Mutomboki militias from the Kitumba gold mine, located in Mwenga, South Kivu. According to residents, the kidnapping was the result of the mining company not fulfilling their promises of development of the area and employment of locals. The expatriates were released on 21 December in the locality of Ngandja, under unknown circumstances. The release followed the arrest of four suspects, among them the leader of militia group Bingilbazala. The link between those arrested and the perpetrators of the abduction was not clarified by the authorities.
Asia ranked second in Constellis’ global ranking for the period of November-December 2019, with almost 27% of all foreign victims recorded. The number of kidnapped foreigners in this period was more than double that logged in the previous two months. This was the result of the continuous increase in incidents carried out by Chinese criminals, linked to loan sharking and gambling activities. During this period, 81% of recorded victims were abducted under such circumstances, mainly in Cambodia and the Philippines, which emerged as top gambling destinations in Southeast Asia. According to data from the Philippine National Police (PNP), such incidents have more than doubled in the past three years, with over 36 incidents involving 58 Chinese victims between January and November 2019. The authorities have identified that the modus operandi of groups engaged in these activities typically involves inviting tourists to come to the Philippines at cheap rates to gamble. Once their money runs out, they lend them additional funds at very high interest rates and short payment deadlines. When gamblers are unable to pay, they are kidnapped pending payment of the debt. A number of incidents have also been linked to labour disputes within Chinese companies in the online gambling sector, also known as ‘POGO’. The Philippine police have reported that victims rescued from these two types of situations often refuse to cooperate with the authorities in the arrest of the perpetrators, fearing consequences in their countries of origin (mainly China), where these activities are illegal. This has in turn led to a high degree of impunity and thus to the inability of the authorities to curb these phenomena. Given the scale of the problem, the Philippines authorities are looking to further regulate gambling activities and establishments, as well as to create a Chinese desk within the PNP in order to address the rise in associated abductions.

**CASES:**

- On 18 November, three alleged members of a Chinese loan shark gang kidnapped a fellow Chinese national in a bid to force him to pay a debt incurred at a casino. The victim, identified as Zhou Zheng Qiang, was able to pay the PHP 1 million (approximately USD 20,000) demanded by the men, which included the debt and added interest. However, the criminals did not release him, and instead demanded an additional payment of PHP 1 million. The victim was rescued on the same day when he managed to get the attention of police on patrol as his captors transferred him to another location. The criminals reportedly attempted to bribe the policemen, offering PHP 5,000 (USD 69), though the officers did not accept and in turn arrested the suspects and released the victim.

- On 21 November, police in Cambodia’s Preah Sihanouk province reported the arrest of 20 Chinese nationals accused of holding 27 of their compatriots hostage in two separate cases. In the first case, 11 suspects kidnapped 11 victims on 15 November, demanding USD 20,000 from each of them for their release. The demand was reportedly on account of a debt incurred at a casino. Police were tipped off by relatives of the victims. The other case occurred on 17 November, when nine Chinese detained 16 compatriots until they settled their debts.

Detentions of foreign nationals in China continued to be reported over the reporting period, as the Chinese regime has taken a harder line on censorship and political dissent, most recently around unrest in Hong Kong. In this context of increased international pressure, mainland authorities are applying greater scrutiny to the activities of foreign nationals under the auspices of the 2014 Counter-Espionage Law and the 2015 National Security Law. A number of expats and visitors have recently been arrested, accused of participating in the unrest, either as a result of their presence near locations where demonstrations have taken place, or after having expressed political views or shared information related to the unrest on social media. Additionally, it is believed that the Chinese authorities may be taking a tougher stance with nationals from countries considered critical of the regime. As such, while in China, all foreign nationals should avoid protests, as well as any activities that may be considered provocative by the authorities. Moreover, it is important to note that as China does not recognise dual citizenship, detained dual nationals may be denied consular assistance.

**CASES:**

- On 20 November, Japanese diplomatic sources confirmed the brief arrest of a 21-year-old Japanese national amid pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong. The man, identified as Hikaru Ida, was detained on 17 November near Hong Kong Polytechnic University in the Kowloon district. According to Japanese officials, the detained man was not attending school in Hong Kong but was a tourist in the city. The Japanese authorities did not elaborate on the details, though said he was released after two days in detention. Earlier, on 14 November, two German citizens were also detained in Hong Kong under similar circumstances. The two men, exchange students at Hong Kong’s Lingnan University, were detained during a dispersal operation of protesters who gathered in the area of Tuen Mun, and who were accused of illegal assembly. The two foreign students were released on bail on 16 November.

In Myanmar, while the overall security threat is assessed as moderate, travel to a number of regions in the country is advised against, due to the threat posed by militant activity and ethnic conflict. This is the case in northern Rakhine State, where armed clashes and violence have intensified since late 2016. Although militant groups in the area mainly target military forces and infrastructure, civilians have increasingly been targeted in attacks, particularly kidnappings. For example, on 3 November, 11 civilians were kidnapped by members of the Arakan Army (AA) while on their way from Paletwa in Chin State to Kyauktaw in Rakhine. The victims included six Indian nationals engaged in a road project in the area and a local MP. Five of the foreign hostages were released the next day, along with the body of the sixth, who reportedly died of a heart attack. The rebel group denied any direct responsibility for the death of the foreign national and claimed they had targeted the MP and his entourage, not the Indian workers. The AA said he had been released to “ensure a sustainable relationship between the Rakhine and Khumi communities”. This was the first time the AA captured foreign nationals in the area, which hosts a series of infrastructure projects linking India and Myanmar.
Statistics for November-December 2019 are drawn from Constellis’ record of 240 kidnapped foreign nationals. Over September-October 2019, Constellis recorded a total of 138 foreign nationals kidnapped across the world.

Global and Regional Geographical Distribution of Victims

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Number of Victims</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AFRICA</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASIA &amp; PACIFIC</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIDDLE EAST</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMERICAS</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EUROPE</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

KIDNAPPED FOREIGN CITIZENS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number of Victims</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CAMBODIA</td>
<td>(29) 12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NIGERIA</td>
<td>(24) 10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOGO</td>
<td>(24) 10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHILIPPINES</td>
<td>(20) 8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Year of Kidnapping)

♦ Including Migrants
**KIDNAPPED FOREIGN CITIZENS**

**REGIONAL ORIGINS OF VICTIMS**

- **SOUTHEAST ASIANS** (97) 40.4%
- **SOUTH ASIANS** (58) 24.2%
- **AFRICANS** (23) 9.6%
- **CENTRAL ASIANS** (3) 1.2%
- **LATIN AMERICANS** (9) 3.8%
- **UNKNOWN** (14) 5.8%
- **MIDDLE EASTERN** (17) 7.1%
- **EUROPEAN** (18) 7.5%

**MOST VICTIMIZED SINGLE NATIONALITY**

- Chinese
- Indian
- Malaysian
- Filipino
- Mauritanian
- Turkish
- Greek
- Nepalese
- Iraqi
- German

**MOST VICTIMIZED ORIGIN BY REGION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REGION</th>
<th>ORIGIN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>South Asians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Americas</td>
<td>Latin Americans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia &amp; Pacific</td>
<td>Southeast Asians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Europeans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>Southeast Asians</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**VICTIMS BY OCCUPATIONAL SECTOR**

- **OTHER** (16) 6.7%
- **MIGRANTS** (18) 7.5%
- **MINING** (19) 7.9%
- **UNKNOWN** (46) 19.2%
- **MARITIME** (106) 44.2%

**DISCLAIMER:** These statistics herein presented are the result of a compilation of kidnapping incidents involving foreign nationals only, which have been reported in the media and other open sources. The information contained still is incomplete and therefore partial as result of the incomplete nature of open-source material. Thus, this report should be taken only as a reference of general trends, taking its limitations into consideration.
Statistics for 2019 are drawn from Constellis' record of 1,569 foreign nationals kidnapped worldwide. In 2018, Constellis registered a total of 1,089 kidnapped foreign nationals.

For the kidnapping of foreign citizens in Jan-Dec 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Number of Victims</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Americas</td>
<td>597</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>383</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia &amp; Pacific</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REST OF THE WORLD</td>
<td>(436) 27.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

REGION

- **AMERICAS**: 38%
- **AFRICA**: 24.4%
- **ASIA & PACIFIC**: 15%
- **MIDDLE EAST**: 11.7%
- **EUROPE**: 10.8%

COUNTRIES

1. **MEXICO** *(506)* 32.2%
2. **GREECE** *(138)* 8.8%
3. **IRAN** *(110)* 7.0%
4. **PHILIPPINES** *(85)* 5.4%
5. **LIBYA** *(79)* 5.1%
6. **NIGERIA** *(76)* 4.8%
7. **CAMBODIA** *(44)* 2.8%
8. **CHINA** *(32)* 2.1%
9. **TOGO** *(34)* 2.2%
10. **REST OF THE WORLD** *(436)* 27.8%

(Number of Victims)

* Including Migrants
JAN-DEC 2019

KIDNAPPED FOREIGN CITIZENS

REGIONAL ORIGINS OF VICTIMS

- **Latin Americans** (539) 34.4%
- **Southeast Asians** (270) 17.2%
- **South Asians** (196) 12.5%
- **Africans** (97) 6.2%
- **Europeans** (111) 7.1%
- **Unknown Origin** (181) 11.5%
- **Central Asians** (8) 0.5%
- **North Africans** (33) 2.1%
- **North Americans** (41) 2.6%
- **Middle Easterners** (93) 5.9%
- **Southeast Asians** (270) 17.2%
- **South Asians** (196) 12.5%
- **Africans** (97) 6.2%
- **Europeans** (111) 7.1%
- **Unknown Origin** (181) 11.5%
- **Central Asians** (8) 0.5%
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- **Africans** (97) 6.2%
- **Europeans** (111) 7.1%
- **Unknown Origin** (181) 11.5%

MOST VICTIMIZED SINGLE NATIONALITY

1. Honduran
2. Chinese
3. Indian
4. Cuban
5. Filipino
6. Guatemalan
7. Bangladeshi
8. Salvadoran
9. American
10. Sudanese

DISCLAIMER: These statistics herein presented are the result of a compilation of kidnapping incidents involving foreign nationals only, which have been reported in the media and other open sources. The information compiled and its results are therefore subject to the inherent nature of open-source material. Thus, this report should be taken only as a reference of general trends, taking its limitations into consideration.
PIRACY UPDATE

the US and its partners, will continue to face a risk of attacks and seizures in the Gulf of Oman, the Strait of Hormuz. Security conditions in the region appeared to stabilize, with only one reported hostile event in the last quarter of 2019. The geographical patterns of serious maritime crime have also been shifting, with an increase in attacks on vessels off the coast of Somalia. In the Gulf of Guinea (GoG), kidnappings more than tripled during the reporting period, with over 90% having occurred in the GoG. Nevertheless, criminal boardings remained the most common maritime crime events globally. While most boardings were non-violent, there was an increase in the number of recorded violent incidents, with Southeast Asia among the most affected areas. Mexico also recorded a series of violent boardings, including an assault on an Italian offshore supply ship north of Ciudad del Carmen, which resulted in the injury of two Italian crew members on 11 November. The International Transport Workers’ Federation subsequently reported a dramatic rise in attacks on maritime infrastructure in the Gulf of Mexico, with an average of 16 incidents recorded per month between January and September 2019.

The November – December increase in maritime violence was part of an upward trend in maritime crime observed in 2019, with 238 incidents recorded by Constellis last year. In contrast, the International Maritime Bureau (IMB) noted a downward trend in piracy, with 182 incidents in 2019. Such discrepancies occur in large part due to persistent underreporting, partly motivated by irregular reporting to international monitoring agencies. Nevertheless, both Constellis and the IMB observed similar broader trends. In geographical terms, the GoG remained the world’s piracy hotspot. With respect to incident types, criminal boardings remained the primary threat to global shipping, despite a remarkable increase in kidnappings in the GoG.

Geopolitical tensions also had a destabilizing effect on maritime security in 2019. One of the most concerning developments has been the deepening US – Iran rift that prompted a deterioration in the security environment in the Gulf of Oman, the Strait of Hormuz and the Persian Gulf. Following a series of tit-for-tat attacks on commercial shipping, drones and oil facilities between May and September, security conditions in the region appeared to stabilize, with only one reported hostile event in the last quarter of 2019. On 30 December, Iran claimed having seized an unidentified foreign tanker near Abu Musa Island on fuel smuggling charges, also detaining the vessel’s 16 Malaysian crew members. US – Iran tensions continued to build-up into the New Year, particularly following the high-profile killing of top Iranian general Qassem Suleimani in a US airstrike in Iraq, resulting in a series of retaliatory attacks. Although at present tension seem to have somewhat lessened, concerns remain that the conflict could again escalate and spread beyond Iraq, with Tehran having specifically mentioned the potential targeting of vital American interests. Tensions also continued to fuel maritime insecurity in the region, with a number of significant incidents recorded in November. These included the 17 November seizure of two South Korea-owned vessels and a Saudi Arabian tug by Houthi rebels, who held the vessels and their crews for two days. Additionally, there are growing concerns that Tehran will influence Houthi rebels to ramp up attacks on the US and its partners as a result of the recent escalation of tensions in Yemen. Underlining this threat, in early December, US forces in the northern Arabian Sea seized a small boat containing suspected Iranian guided missile parts as it was heading to Yemen. This was the first time such sophisticated components have been taken en route to the war there. Furthermore, following an attack on an Iranian state-owned oil tanker in the Red Sea in October, Tehran made a statement saying that had been the third incident targeting Iranian vessels in 2019, after the attacks on tankers Helin and Happiness in August and May 2019 respectively. These alleged attacks remain unconfirmed, with reports at the time having indicated the vessels had suffered technical problems. Nonetheless, there are concerns they can be used by Iran as a pretext to expand its hostile activity in the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea. In this context, commercial shipping in the region, particularly that affiliated with the warring parties, the US and its allies, is facing a significant risk of attacks and seizures by rebel forces. Meanwhile on the Korean peninsula, the South Korean military fired warning shots toward a North Korean merchant vessel after it violated their sea border in late November, allegedly due to engine trouble. Although tensions cooled down over 2019, the area will remain a dangerous place for commercial shipping in the absence of serious diplomatic progress.

Elsewhere in the world, geopolitical tensions curtailed maritime security in Libya and the Korean Peninsula towards the end of 2019. In Libya, Turkey’s involvement in the war between the UN-recognised Government of National Accord (GNA) and the forces of General Khalifa Haftar has proved highly destabilizing. Turkey signed maritime and security agreements with the GNA in late November, antagonizing Haftar and drawing international criticism. Haftar’s forces subsequently seized a Grenada-flagged ship with its three Turkish crew members off Libya’s eastern city of Dierna on 21 December and held it for three days. Turkey has since begun deploying military assets to the country, while Haftar has banned ships from calling to Misrata and Al Khums. According to unconfirmed reports, Haftar’s forces also recently seized an Italian cargo ship near Misrata, allegedly to be searched for any military equipment. The situation remains tense, with commercial shipping, particularly Turkey-affiliated vessels, facing a considerable risk of attacks or seizures by rebel forces. Meanwhile on the Korean peninsula, the South Korean military fired warning shots toward a North Korean merchant vessel after it violated its sea border in late November, allegedly due to engine trouble. Although tensions cooled down over 2019, the area will remain a dangerous place for commercial shipping in the absence of serious diplomatic progress.

Maritime crime in the Gulf of Aden and the wider East Africa region increased, from zero incidents in September and October, to five over November and December. Incidents in the reporting period included a hijacking off Somalia’s coast, bringing the total number of these occurrences in the area in 2019 to two. Despite the overall low piracy levels in the region in recent years, these incidents have underscored the prevailing kidnap for ransom threat. Underlining this, on 4 December, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 2500, renewing the authorization for Somalia anti-piracy measures through December 2020. Meanwhile, the conflict in Yemen also continued to fuel maritime insecurity in the region, with a large spike in crew kidnappings reported in November. These included the 17 November seizure of two South Korea-owned vessels and a Saudi Arabian tug by Houthi rebels, who held the vessels and their crews for two days. Additionally, there are growing concerns that Tehran will influence Houthi rebels to ramp up attacks on the US and its partners as a result of the recent escalation of tensions with Washington, as Iran has long been accused of arming and using the Houthis as a proxy. Underlining this threat, in early December, US forces from in the northern Arabian Sea seized a small boat containing suspected Iranian guided missile parts as it was heading to Yemen. This was the first time such sophisticated components have been taken en route to the war there. Furthermore, following an attack on an Iranian state-owned oil tanker in the Red Sea in October, Tehran made a statement saying that had been the third incident targeting Iranian vessels in 2019, after the attacks on tankers Helin and Happiness in August and May 2019 respectively. These alleged attacks remain unconfirmed, with reports at the time having indicated the vessels had suffered technical problems. Nonetheless, there are concerns they can be used by Iran as a pretext to expand its hostile activity in the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea. In this context, commercial shipping in the region, particularly that affiliated with the warring parties, the US and its allies, is facing a significant risk of attacks and seizures by rebel forces. Meanwhile on the Korean peninsula, the South Korean military fired warning shots toward a North Korean merchant vessel after it violated its sea border in late November, allegedly due to engine trouble. Although tensions cooled down over 2019, the area will remain a dangerous place for commercial shipping in the absence of serious diplomatic progress.
CASES:

- On 9 December, Somali pirates hijacked an unlisted cargo dhow while it was en route from Djibouti to Mogadishu. The ARS 13 was released on 13 December, after Puntland Marine Forces threatened to free the vessel by force. Notably, the same ship was seized and released in March 2017. At the time, the responsible pirates said they had agreed to forgo a ransom after learning that a prominent Somali businessman had hired the ship to transport oil.

- Chemical product tanker Duke was boarded by six pirates roughly 115 nautical miles southeast of Lome, Togo, at approximately 0800 UTC on 15 December. All but one of the 21 crew members were abducted. All seafarers taken hostage were Indian nationals, while the one left aboard was a Nigerian citizen. The hostages were released on 19 January, with the exception of an Able Seaman, who was reported to have passed away in captivity as a result of an illness. This was the largest kidnapping recorded in the GoG in 2019, following the 3 December abduction of 19 crew members, including 18 Indian nationals, from oil tanker VLCC Nave Constellation in Nigeria. Notably, Indian nationals accounted for the majority of kidnapped crew members in the GoG over the past two years; with New Delhi having previously sought to place restrictions on Indian seafarers operating on vessels transiting the region.

- On 22 December, Philippine security forces rescued two out of three Indonesian fishermen held hostage by the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) following a gunfight in Barangay Pugad Manaul. The third victim was rescued in a follow-on operation in Bato-Bato on 15 January. The three fishermen were kidnapped off Tambisan Island, Malaysia, on 23 September. Early reports indicated that during their time in captivity, the victims had been held by two different ASG units and that a PHP 300 million (nearly USD 6 million) ransom had been initially demanded for their release. This amount was later reduced to PHP 30 million (roughly USD 600,000) via a hostage video released on Facebook on 16 November, where the victims are seen bare-chested with their hands tied up; appealing to their employer and the Indonesian President to secure their freedom.

Although piracy and armed robbery incidents in Southeast Asia nearly doubled over November and December, overall levels of piracy in the region in 2019 remained generally consistent when compared to previous years. Of concern, however, has been the intensification of maritime crime in the Singapore Straits (SS), with a nearly fivefold increase in 2019 when compared to 2018. Nevertheless, the total number of incidents remain low with 31 incidents in 2019, compared to a peak of 99 in 2015. Also of concern over the past year has been the enduring incidence of crew kidnappings in waters of Eastern Sabah, with two such events recorded in 2019. Southeast Asia’s marine security was also impacted by geopolitical issues towards the end of 2019, amid a flare up in tensions between Indonesia and China over a territorial dispute in the South China Sea. In late December, Chinese coast guard and fishing boats entered waters around Natuna Islands, where Indonesia has established an EEZ. The incident resulted in Indonesia having since increased patrols around the islands. Chinese incursions have long been an issue in the area, with Indonesian – Chinese coast guard skirmishes having occurred in the past. Therefore, an underlying risk of an escalation of the dispute remains, potentially affecting commercial shipping.
Cybersecurity has emerged in recent years as a key component of a nation’s offensive output. While conventional military capabilities retain their place as indicators of military strength, or acting as a deterrent, state-sponsored cyber-attacks are a subversive means by which aggressors can target their foes' government, economy, infrastructure and reputation. Such attacks can be a much greater risk to a nation than traditional means of military action. For instance, though long-range missile tests may be a demonstration of military prowess, a nation’s military power can effectively be nullified if their energy infrastructure is brought down in a cyber-attack. Moreover, in comparison with overt military strikes that are typically easily attributable, the authors of cyber-attacks are often difficult to pin down or link with certainty to nation state actors. As such, cyberwarfare affords nations added layers of anonymity with which to facilitate their covert virtual attacks against one another, thereby avoiding accountability. As an illustration of the increasing appeal of state-sponsored cyberwarfare, it is believed that approximately 23% of all breaches in 2019 were perpetrated by nation states and their affiliates, up from 12% in 2018.

The motivations behind state-sponsored cybercrime can be numerous, ranging from degrading an opponent’s military capabilities to financial gain. State-sponsored North Korean hackers, for instance, were reported to have stolen over USD 650 million in foreign currency and cryptocurrencies between 2015 and 2018.Corporate espionage, financial disruption and the theft of Intellectual Property (IP) are other strategic motivators behind state-sponsored cyber-attacks. Of note, it is believed that 70% of the US’s corporate IP theft emanates from China. Meanwhile, initially state-backed ransomware viruses, such as NotPetya from Russia and WannaCry from North Korea, went on to spread globally, costing governments and the business sector billions of dollars. Other motivations can be reputational. Representative of this is the cyber-attack that disrupted the opening ceremony of the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympics, which is thought to have originated from Russia after its athletes were banned from the tournament on doping allegations.

For the most part, state-sponsored actors utilise regular attack methodologies with which to perpetrate their attacks, including via phishing techniques and abusing known exploits (a software or command that takes advantage of security vulnerabilities in software and hardware). In addition to being effective, these generic hacking methods enable attackers to better mask their identities. In this way, cyber-attacks are harder to trace back to their originator states. Over the past decade, North America and several European powers have developed their cyber capabilities, investing significant resources into their cyber espionage and security campaigns. Meanwhile, the most active sponsors of cyber-attacks against the West are Russia; China, North Korea and Iran. Relations between the US and Iran have been particularly fractious in recent years, provoking a string of cyber-attacks between the two countries. Notable examples include the US’s attack against Iran’s nuclear programme in 2010 via a malicious worm called Stuxnet, while in 2012-2013, Iran was behind a series of substantial distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks against the world’s major banks in retaliation for the sanctions imposed by the US and other Western countries. Iran has also been engaged in cyber espionage, with nine Iranians prosecuted by the US in March 2018 for compromising thousands of accounts linked to foreign universities, schools, companies and government departments, most of them belonging to the US. Iranian attacks over the past few years have additionally targeted industrial facilities; these included an attempt by Iranian hackers to take control of a dam in a New York suburb in 2016.

Tensions between Washington and Tehran worsened recently following a US drone strike in Iraq on 3 January 2020, which killed leading Iranian military commander Qassem Suleimani. The incident sparked outrage in Iran, who threatened a ‘heavy handed’ response against the US. Indeed, while Iran and its proxy groups staged physical retaliatory strikes involving missile and rocket attacks against US assets in Iraq, cyber security experts fear that cyber-attacks will also escalate significantly against American interests. In a recent advisory, the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) warned of ‘disruptive and destructive cyber operations’ against US strategic assets such as those in the energy and telecommunications sectors, as well as ‘cyber-enabled espionage and intellectual property theft’ against government agencies, the military, universities and commercial entities. Soon after the killing of Suleimani, on 5 January, an attack by a pro-Iran group defaced the website of the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP), depicting President Donald Trump being punched in the face. While at present there is no evidence confirming that the Iranian state was involved, anti-US hackers will likely continue to mount similar inflammatory campaigns.

Overall, with attacks from state-sponsored sources having increased significantly in recent years, activity is expected to grow into 2020 – particularly as more countries develop their cyber capabilities, such as Pakistan and Vietnam. As demonstrated by recent threats from Iran following the drone strike that killed Suleimani, geopolitical tensions will continue to drive this type of activity. While attacks on critical infrastructure will be of most concern, state-sponsored cyberwarfare will also continue to target government and commercial enterprises, both for espionage and economic sabotage.

CASES:

- In May 2019, the Israeli Defence Forces claimed to have bombed the base of a Hamas hacking group in Gaza, who had purportedly been targeting Israel with cyber-attacks. This is thought to be the first instance in which a physical military response was enacted by a state following a cyber-attack.

- In June 2019, reports were received that the US had implanted malware into Russia’s power grid in retaliation for Russia’s hacking operations targeting US energy infrastructure. The malware, while never activated, was allegedly able to turn off the electricity supply to Russian homes, schools and hospitals.

- In October 2019, alleged state-sponsored Iranian hackers conducted cyber-attacks aimed at disrupting the 2020 US presidential election campaigns. Microsoft announced that over 2,700 attempts were made to obtain email accounts for US government officials associated with election campaigns and journalists covering them.

The killing of Iranian military commander Qassem Suleimani by the US, on 3 January 2020, will likely provoke increased cyber-attacks against the US by Iran (Photo: JN).
FOCUS ARTICLE

CRISIS COMMUNICATION

A central tenet of effective crisis response is the management of information and communications. This has become even more important since the development and widespread use of social media networks. Even if the operational management of the crisis is well executed, poor communication can prove catastrophic for the reputation of an organisation. In the words of Warren Buffett: “It takes 20 years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it”. The United Airlines PR disaster in 2017 following the forcible removal of a passenger from an aircraft and Facebook’s failure to respond in a timely manner to a major data scandal story in 2018 are pertinent examples on how not to communicate in a crisis.

A communications strategy should serve a particular purpose and fit with the overall strategy of the Crisis Management Team (CMT). To this end, it is essential to assign a communications function within the CMT, which will not only ensure a strategic approach and a professional input to all communications but will also provide a gatekeeper function, vetting all statements before they are published. In certain situations, notably where media interest is significant and potentially widespread use of social media networks. Even if improperly briefed or if rumour and gossip are allowed to spread internally, they can be a troublesome source of negative publicity. As such, they must be engaged with carefully as a matter of priority. Staff, particularly those close to the event, should be instructed not to speak to the media or share information with friends, families, colleagues, or on social media.

In summary, good crisis management can be ruined by poor crisis communication but the reverse is also true: poor crisis management can be salvaged by good crisis communication.

Consequently, an organisation must be prepared to handle any possible scenario to limit the crisis, whether that be through a reactive or proactive stance.

A good rule of thumb is to consider whether or not releasing information into the public domain will have a positive or negative effect and which option is likely to cause the least harm or the most good. Each situation will have its own unique factors to take into account and it is important to consider these when deciding how to proceed. Always bear in mind that you cannot control what is printed and, once released, information cannot be retracted. A good example of this is the statement made by the CEO of BP, Tony Hayward, in the aftermath of the Deepwater Horizon disaster in 2010, where he not only played down the scale and consequences of the oil spill, stating that the environmental impact of the disaster “is likely to have been very, very modest” but also mixed his apology for the spill with a comment that focused attention on his own feelings, when he stated: “…there is no one who wants this over more than I do, I would like my life back.”

That self-lying statement proved to be disastrous publicity for both BP and for Tony Hayward who was later replaced as CEO. Beyond the obvious importance of carefully managing the message, the choice of spokesperson, their experience and abilities and the extent of their preparation prior to making a statement are critical success factors. In being properly prepared to deal with immediate questions in the aftermath of the event, it is essential to have all relevant information to hand, and to separate fact from assumption. Background material should also be sourced, with details of similar previous incidents faced by the organisation, as well as other companies in the sector. Sources of information should be clearly identified and their reliability assessed. It is also important to identify who has knowledge of the incident and whether it has already surfaced in the traditional media and/or social media and if not, how much time the organisation has to prepare a reactive or proactive response. In order to manage the media, and engage in timely and effective external communications, all types of media should be constantly monitored from the onset of the event. The organisation should know who is talking about them and what they are saying, as soon as they are saying it. This will enable the communications/PR team to adapt the communication strategy as the crisis evolves.

When making public statements, the organisation has access to a number of vectors: press releases, press conferences and messages on social networks. One or more of these can be used effectively although choosing a press conference represents the greatest risk because of the potential for unplanned, unintentionally negative or misconstrued comments by spokespersons. However, if warranted by the situation and communications strategy, such forums can be highly effective in getting the message across and in this scenario, it is vital to identify the key messages to be conveyed and draft responses to all potential questions that may be raised, as well as to rehearse beforehand. This will help mitigate the element of surprise.

Any briefing should follow a FACT structure;

- **F**acts Only be based on factual, validated information. The message needs to be precise. Rumours and inaccurate information should be confronted as soon as possible.

- **A**ction The organisation is addressing the issue and is taking all the due steps in solving the crisis. Focus on the decisions taken since the beginning of the crisis.

- **C**ompassion People feel deeply about this, particularly those close to the victims; acknowledge the situation and its impact.

- **T**ransparency It is acceptable to not know something, but it is not acceptable to lie.

Finally, crisis communication should not be limited to external parties. Internally, employees are an organisation’s primary stakeholders and its key asset, for good and bad, because if improperly briefed or if rumour and gossip are allowed to spread internally, they can be a troublesome source of negative publicity. As such, they must be engaged with carefully as a matter of priority. Staff, particularly those close to the event, should be instructed not to speak to the media or share information with friends, families, colleagues, or on social media.
About Constellis

Constellis is a leading provider of risk management, humanitarian, social intelligence, training and operational support services to government and commercial clients throughout the world. Operating in over 45 countries, Constellis’ 20,000 employees bring unparalleled dedication and passion for creating a safer world by upholding the highest standards of compliance, quality, and integrity.

Constellis’ forward thinking services span a broad range of synergistic solutions, from the boardroom to the project site, encompassing risk governance, organizational resilience, business continuity management, crisis management, travel security, global tracking, training, protective security, life support, logistics and specialist support such as K9 services and UAV systems.

At Constellis, our number one mission is to secure success for our customers. Constellis combines the legacy capabilities and experience of ACADEMI, Triple Canopy, Centerra, Olive Group, OmniPlex, AMK9, Edinburgh International, Strategic Social and all of their affiliates. The consolidation of companies under the Constellis name allows our clients to rely on one single partner and project experience that spans the globe.

For more information about Constellis, please visit our website at: www.constellis.com

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