Summary

- There has been a decrease in activity along the Saudi-Yemeni border in this reporting period, although an underlying risk of indirect fire and militant incursions remains. Notably, on 1 March, a Houthi IED allegedly destroyed a Saudi military vehicle in Jizan province while on 7 March, Houthi forces allegedly captured a military base in the Al-Dababa region of Najran province. These reports have not been confirmed by the Saudi government.

- Saudi Border Guards continued to foil a number of attempts to smuggle drugs into the Kingdom. According to a spokesperson, large quantities of hashish and heroin were confiscated in the southern border regions of Najran, Asir and Jizan. In a separate instance in the northern border of Halat Ammar, border guards seized nearly 5 million pills of the amphetamine Captagon and 400kg of hashish. A total of 22 smugglers were arrested.

- An Islamic State terrorist suspect, originally from Yemen, has appeared in front of the Specialized Criminal Court in Riyadh, accused of running over and stabbing a police corporal in Riyadh in 2015. Omar Saeed Mahdi Bahaismi confessed to being a member of the international terrorist organization Islamic State, and that the attack on the corporal was premeditated. The trial is ongoing, but the prosecutor has asked for the death penalty.

- Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman visited the United Kingdom from 6—9 March, resulting in a number of new trade and defence contract agreements. Mohammad bin Salman and British Prime Minister Theresa May discussed ways to end the ongoing conflict and humanitarian suffering in Yemen, agreeing that the reopening of ports in Yemen is of the utmost importance. A GBP65 billion mutual trade and investment target was also agreed during the meetings.

- Over the same period as the Saudi state visit to the United Kingdom, British officials were told that the initial public offering (IPO) of Saudi state oil company Aramco is likely to be delayed until 2019. The Saudi government had targeted a market listing for the second half of 2018, but preparedness for the offering had been put into question previously. During this reporting period it also emerged that it is unlikely that the Aramco listing will appear on international markets, and will be listed solely on Saudi Arabia’s Tadawul Stock Exchange.
**Significant Events: 01 - 15 March 2018**

**Saudi Arabia Bi-Weekly Summary**

**Halat Ammar: 11 March.**
A Saudi border patrol foiled a number of attempts to smuggle Captagon and hashish into the Kingdom from Jordan. Nearly 5 million pills and 400kg of hashish were confiscated.

**Jizan, Asir and Najran: various dates.**
According to unconfirmed accounts, a number of Saudi soldiers were killed in the southern border region. Reportedly, Houthi forces in Yemen used IED and sniper fire in the attacks. These reports have not been verified by the Saudi government.

**Najran, Asir and Jizan: 5 March.**
Multiple drugs seizures close to the Yemeni border were reported this month. Since 28 February, over 400 kilograms of hashish has been confiscated by the authorities, and 22 individuals arrested on smuggling related charges in three of the southern border regions.

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**Saudi Arabia Country Threat Ratings**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Locations &amp; Ratings</th>
<th>Saudi Arabia</th>
<th>Riyadh</th>
<th>Jeddah</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crime</td>
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<td>Terrorism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Overall Rating</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Threat Ratings**
- 1 - Minimal
- 2 - Low
- 3 - Moderate
- 4 - High
- 5 - Very High

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KSA state visit made to the United Kingdom

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman visited the United Kingdom from 6-9 March, helping to redefine the Kingdom’s priorities for UK business. The Saudi Prince’s visit resulted in new agreements with the British government and the signing of a number of defence deals.

Mohammad bin Salman and his delegation of Saudi officials and business leaders held talks with British Prime Minister Theresa May at 10 Downing Street. The meeting resulted in the launch of the UK-Saudi Arabia Strategic Partnership Council. Additionally, a broad understanding was agreed for a GBP65 billion mutual trade and investment target, which would include direct investment in Britain and new Saudi public procurement from British companies.

Both parties also agreed that a political solution is the only way to end the conflict and humanitarian suffering in Yemen. News agencies reported consensus on the importance of full humanitarian and commercial access to Yemen, including access to air and seaports. The Foreign Ministers of both countries subsequently agreed to monitor the navigation routes in preparation of the reopening of Yemeni ports.

Mohammad bin Salman was also received by Queen Elizabeth at Buckingham Palace, a distinction usually reserved for heads of state. The meeting shows the high regard in which the heir-presumptive to Saudi Arabia in held by the British government.

During the delegation, the crown prince and defense secretary signed two memorandums to improve Saudi defense capabilities and to increase cooperation and partnership in the fields such as knowledge transfer, manufacturing partnership, training, research and technical support, as detailed by Vision 2030.

Cooperation discussions included also other sectors such as education, healthcare, renewable energy and finance. The UK is also lobbying for the Aramco stock market listing on the London Stock Exchange, but no decision was reached on this during the visit.

COMMENT: According to the UK Defence Secretary, Gavin Williamson, defence and security are at the heart of bilateral relations between Britain and Saudi Arabia. In February 2014, British arms company BAE systems agreed to supply Saudi Arabia with 72 Typhoon fighter jets, worth GBP 4.4billion.

Currently, the UK Ministry of Defence Saudi Armed Forces Project (MODSAP) supplies weapons and services to the Saudi Armed Forces under the Saudi-British Defence Cooperation Programme (SBDCP). The primary role of MODSAP is to monitor the progress and performance of the SBDCP and BAE Systems to ensure that the requirements of Saudi Arabia’s armed forces are faithfully met. The UK MoD also runs the Saudi Arabia National Communications Project, which aims to improve the communications capabilities of the Saudi National Guard.

The Saudi state meeting was met with some criticism by humanitarian activists who oppose the use of British-manufactured arms being used in Saudi Arabia’s ongoing conflict with the Houthi forces in Yemen. Criticisms came to the forefront in mid-2017, when the British High Court ruled that UK arms exports to Saudi are lawful,
after seeing secret evidence.

This week’s visit has presented significant opportunities for British business. As the UK is preparing to leave the European Union and trade as an independent nation for the first time in 40 years. This comes at a time when Saudi Arabia is undergoing a program of social and economic reform as part of the wider Vision 2030 strategy, which presents great prospect for UK investment.

Furthermore, the UK’s tourism body “Visit Britain” revealed that Saudi tourists to the UK spent GBP794 million in the first nine months of 2017, twice the amount spent in 2016. London is the number one spot for Saudi travellers visiting Europe. The Director of Visit Britain highlighted the importance of Saudi visitors to the UK tourism sector, and hopes to draw more Saudi tourists to the UK following Britain’s departure from the EU.

COMMENT ENDS.

**KSA approve new policy on nuclear energy**

Saudi Arabia confirmed its plans to produce nuclear energy for the first time, since a US-Saudi delegation discussed the project earlier in March. The Saudi Ministry of Culture and information said on 15 March that its new policy on nuclear energy would ensure that all nuclear activities will be restricted to peaceful purposes, with the accepted framework defined by international legislation, treaties and conventions.

The Ministry added that Saudi Arabia remains committed to complying with the principles of transparency in regulatory and operational aspects, and conforming to clear safety and security standards.

A nuclear energy plan was initially approved by the Saudi government in July 2017, but finalized details on the number of proposed nuclear energy plants or global partners have not yet been disclosed.

**COMMENT:** United States Energy Secretary Rick Perry led an inter-agency delegation that met with Saudi officials during the state visit to the United Kingdom, to discuss Saudi Arabia’s civil nuclear program. A potential deal between the US and Saudi Arabia could involve up to 16 reactors across the next 25 years, and cost up to USD80 million.

A big question that arose during the US-Saudi meeting was whether any deal would require a “123 Agreement”, that usually serves as a prerequisite for negotiations and ensures countries agree to the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons.

Saudi Arabia has previously refused to completely eliminate the prospect of enriching uranium, citing the ability of Iran to enrich uranium as part of the 2015 nuclear accord put in place to stop the country from achieving nuclear weapons.

This fast-tracked atomic energy policy is also said to be part of the wider Saudi Vision 2030 to reduce the country’s dependence on oil. According to the King Abdullah City for Atomic and Renewable Energy (KACARE), by 2040 55 percent of Saudi Arabia’s power will come from solar, wind, geothermal and nuclear energy combined.** COMMENT ENDS.**
Increased rights for Saudi women in a number of areas

A number of new civil rights for women in various areas have been granted in this reporting period. Firstly, on 11 March, it was reported that divorced Saudi women would no longer be required to file a lawsuit to gain custody of their children, provided there are no disputes between the parents. Mothers may now simply submit a request to the relevant court, without the need for legal action.

Mothers also now have the right to carry out all formalities related to her children at government departments, embassies, education offices and schools, and to apply for and collect her children’s passports. Women will also be able to collect all child support and maintenance from government and civil entities, but may not travel with her children outside Saudi Arabia without a judge’s permission.

Secondly, from 12 March, female Saudi lawyers have been granted new legal powers. They can now obtain a notarization permit that allows them to assume some of the functions of public notaries. The Justice Ministry is finalizing formal procedures to receive women’s applications to procure a notarization permit upon completion of the pre-requisites.

According to Saudi lawyer Majed Garoub, this decision will lead to greater appreciation of women’s role and status in judicial and legal work. Female lawyers wishing to be licensed will undergo the same procedures as their male counterparts.

Finally, on 15 March, it was announced that Saudi women are being allowed to join the Saudi civil defence force. The Deputy Director General of Civil Defence for Safety Affairs, Abdul Rahman Al Hussaini, said that there have been several meetings with the civil service ministry to recruit women as safety officials in Civil Defence and in the public sector. In addition, technical safety and civil defence courses will be offered to both men and women in colleges and universities.

COMMENT: Saudi Arabia has embarked on a number of changes for the rights and liberties of female citizens over the past years in line with the wider Vision 2030 strategy. Previously, in September 2017, women were granted the right to drive for the first time in the country. Until then, Saudi Arabia was the only country in the world where women were forbidden to drive. Licenses are set to be issued to women starting 24 June 2018.

Saudi Arabia’s commitment to improving gender equality is being recognised by the international community. During the recent state visit of Mohammad bin Salman to the UK, British MP Naz Shah praised the contribution of the Crown Prince in improving gender relations in the Kingdom. Shah said that the prince had acted out of both an ideological commitment and practical necessity in improving women’s right, and announced her optimism for Saudi’s future.

COMMENT ENDS.
**SECURITY UPDATE**

On 21 November 2017 the US State Department updated its travel warning for Saudi Arabia, reiterating its call for US citizens to carefully consider the risk of traveling to the country, due to continuing threats from terrorist groups and the threat of ballistic missile attacks on civilian targets by rebel forces in Yemen. Yemeni forces regularly fire artillery at Saudi border towns and launch cross-border attacks against Saudi military personnel. The warning once again confirmed the prohibition of government personnel travelling within 50 miles of the Yemeni border, as well as to the cities of Jizan and Najran in the south, and to the towns of Qatif and Hofuf in Eastern Province without prior permission.

**Yemen updates**

There has been a decrease of reported activity along the Saudi-Yemeni border in this reporting period, although further volatility is to be expected for the medium term.

Despite the reduction in confirmed incidents, Houthi forces in Yemen have continued to attack strategic locations in the southern Saudi provinces of Jizan, Najran and Asir.

Significant incidents over the reporting period include:

- **On 1 March**, it was announced that a Houthi IED allegedly destroyed a Saudi military vehicle in Jizan province, resulting in the deaths of an unconfirmed number of Saudi soldiers. The incident was not confirmed by the Saudi government.
- **On 2 March**, rebel forces announced that Houthi militants had used an anti-tank guided missile (ATGM) to destroy a Saudi M1A2 Abrams tank. No fatalities were reported in this incident, which was not confirmed by the Saudi government.
- **On 6 March**, it was announced that Houthi forces allegedly shot dead four Saudi soldiers in two separate incidents in Jizan and Najran provinces. According to sources, three soldiers were killed in the Quwa village area of Jizan, and the fourth soldier was killed at the al-Ashah military base in Najran. This incident was not confirmed by the Saudi government.
- **On 7 March**, Houthi forces allegedly ambushed and captured strategic Saudi Arabian military locations in the Al Dababa region of Najran province. An unconfirmed number of soldiers were allegedly killed. This incident was not confirmed by the Saudi government.
- **On 8 March**, Houthi militants claimed to have used an IED to destroy a Saudi military vehicle in Jizan province, near the Tuwal border crossing point. According to Yemeni news sources, this resulted in the death of 10 Saudi soldiers. The vehicle in question was an Oshkosh M-ATV. This has not been confirmed by the Saudi government.
- **On 10 March**, it was reported by the Yemeni Observer media outlet that 17 Saudi soldiers were along the Yemeni border in the first ten days of March.
On 12 March, Houthi forces allegedly launched an assault on Saudi forces in the Al Azhar area of the Qais mountains in Jizan. Two Saudi military vehicles were destroyed, and an unconfirmed number of Saudi soldiers were killed. This assault was not confirmed by the Saudi government.

On 13 March, a Houthi sniper allegedly shot and killed a Saudi soldier in an uninhabited area of Jizan province. This was not confirmed by the Saudi government.

Border guards seize 400kg of drugs in a number of incidents

According to the Saudi Border Guards, authorities arrested 22 individuals and seized more than 400kg of drugs from 28 February – 5 March. According to a spokesman for the border guards, large quantities hashish and heroin were confiscated in the southern border regions of Najran, Asir and Jizan. The spokesman also stated that 22 people were arrested. Of the 22, 11 were Ethiopian, 10 were Yemenis and one was a Saudi citizen. According to the reports, 356kg of the drugs were hashish and 52kg of the drugs were heroin.

In addition, on 11 March it was announced that Saudi authorities had foiled several attempts to smuggle Smillon Captagon pills into Saudi Arabia since 1 March. According to a spokesperson for the border guards, customs officials in the northern border crossing of Halat Ammar foiled an attempt to smuggle 4.8 million Captagon pills and 349.7kg of hashish into the country, hidden inside a vehicle.

**COMMENT:** Drug smuggling is a major social security concern for Saudi Arabia. Every month, hundreds of kilograms are confiscated by border guards. There is concern amongst the Saudi authorities that heroin, hashish, marijuana and the amphetamine-based Captagon that is smuggled into the kingdom is being sold to finance terrorist operations in Yemen and Saudi Arabia.

Countering drug trafficking is an issue that requires regional cooperation. Anti-narcotics departments from the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Oman jointly foiled four operations and arrested 12 suspects in connection to drug trafficking in Yemen in the first three months of 2018. Col Taher Al Daheri, director of Abu Dhabi Police’s Drug Control department, said they were tipped-off about a regional network of drug traffickers plotting to smuggle 50 kilogrammes of hashish from Yemen to Oman through the UAE.

**COMMENT ENDS.**

Yemeni Islamic State terrorist on trial for murder

The trial of a Yemeni member of the terrorist organisation Islamic State (IS) started on 11 March at the Specialised Criminal Court (SCC) in Riyadh. The SCC heard that Omar Saeed Mahdi Bahaismi ran over and stabbed police corporal Methel Fahd Mohammed Al-Salouli as he returned from prayers at the mosque.

In 2015, Bahaismi repeatedly ran over the officer, and then stabbed him with a knife multiple times. Bahaismi confessed to being a member of IS, and that the attack on the corporal was premeditated and planned. He also confessed to communicating with members of IS outside of Saudi Arabia.

The penalty for engaging in terrorist activities in Saudi Arabia is often death which has been called for by the prosecution. The court is still deliberating on the judgement.

**COMMENT:** IS is known to be active in Saudi Arabia. The group were responsible for an August 2015 mosque bombing in Asir province that killed 15 people and injured nine. Prior to this, in May 2015 IS claimed responsibility for the Qatif and Dammam mosque bombings, that killed 25 Shia Saudis and wounded a further 106.

More recently, in March 2017, an IS group member attacked and killed a Saudi police officer, and was later shot dead by Saudi police in Riyadh. Saudi Arabia is also at risk from the potential return of the 2500 Saudi foreign fighters who have left for Syria in order to join IS.

**COMMENT ENDS.**
EASTERN PROVINCE SECURITY SUMMARY

Following decades of discontent Shia majority areas in Eastern Province are at growing risk of instability. Numerous risk factors need to be closely observed.

Shia militancy. Low-level but relentless small arms fire attacks on security forces in Qatif and Dammam continue to sour relations between the local community and security forces, in turn driving youth radicalization. With villages such as Awamiya having existed under a prevailing state of emergency since popular protests in 2011, there is a growing risk that confrontations between Shia militants and the Saudi state will escalate. On 1 August 2017, hundreds of people fled Awamiya, due to government forces fighting Shia gunmen. Tensions had been escalating since May 2017, due to authorities’ attempts to tear down the old quarter to prevent fighters using the narrow streets to evade capture.

Popular mobilization. There is an enduring risk that discontent among Shia communities will translate into popular protests such as those seen in 2011. On 2 January residents of Awamiya reportedly took to the streets to commemorate the first anniversary of the execution of Sheikh Nimr Baqir al-Nimr, Al-Nimr – a revered cleric and the spiritual leader of Shia dissent in Saudi Arabia – was extremely popular with disaffected Shia and his execution has helped further alienate the community. Other local issues such as the planned demolition of historic homes in Mosawara may combine with the growing militancy of the youth to trigger wider protests with little warning.

Regional rivalries. The situation in Shia areas of Eastern Province is sensitive to developments in Bahrain, which is currently witnessing a period of significantly heightened tensions. Most recently, on 27 February there was a bomb attack on a police bus, wounding five officers. Against a background of growing militant attacks, Bahraini authorities have been escalating their prosecution of leaders of the Shia protest movement, fueling further dissent. The House of Saud strongly supports Bahrain’s ruling family in its confrontation with elements of the Shia population, which it sees as part of the broader conflict with Iran.
Aramco IPO allegedly stalled

According to the Financial Times, British officials were told during last week’s Saudi state visit that the initial public offering (IPO) of Saudi Aramco is likely to be delayed until 2019. The Saudi government had targeted a market listing by the second half of 2018, but preparedness for the offering had been questioned.

According to sources in the Saudi government, it is also likely that Aramco will be floated locally on the Tadawul Stock Exchange, as plans for an IPO listed on an international exchange are becoming less attractive.

According to sources in the Saudi government, there is much debate over where the IPO should be listed. According to Energy Minister Khalid al-Falih, listing Aramco in the United States opens Aramco up to a number of legal concerns. This includes existing lawsuits against rival oil companies for their role in climate change, as well as potential lawsuits by the families of victims of the 9/11, as they allege Saudi Arabia shielded the perpetrators.

According to Reuters, there is now only a fifty percent chance that Aramco will be listed on an international exchange. The Tadawul Exchange is relatively small, with about USD475 billion of value listed, and as such any listing of the magnitude of Aramco could also pose significant risks to the stability of the domestic exchange for a number of reasons.

Firstly, if the company listed solely on Tadawul, and five percent is listed as per usual practice, then the company may have challenges achieving anything near the USD2 trillion valuation. There may not be enough investors willing to invest on the Tadawul exchange to raise a full USD100 billion. Investment bankers will be cognisant of this in advance, and it could make them fearful of such a high valuation.

Secondly, if Aramco were to list five percent on Tadawul and achieve a USD2 trillion valuation through a combination of foreign investment and Saudi exuberance, Aramco would become a alarmingly large part of the exchange at around 17 percent of the entire value of the Tadawul.

As the price of oil tends to fluctuate, the values of oil companies do so too. A drop in the value of Aramco would be catastrophic for Tadawul and perhaps the Saudi economy. A major drop in Aramco stock would cause the Tadawul index to plummet, which could cause a run on the Saudi exchange. Under this scenario stock holders could begin to cash out of their investments.

Given that the entire reason behind the IPO is to diversify the Saudi economy away from a reliance on hydrocarbon wealth, listing Aramco solely on the Tadawul exchange could be counterproductive to the Vision 2030 strategy.

COMMENT ENDS.
KSA and Egypt agree to USD10billion deal to develop economic zone

On 4 March, Saudi Arabia and Egypt extended their economic cooperation, by agreeing on a USD10billion deal to develop a planned megacity and business zone that would span the border between the two countries.

The agreement came during a visit to Egypt by Prince Muhammad Bin-Salman. Saudi Arabia has been a crucial financial backer of Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, sending billions of dollars to support the Egyptian economy since the former Field Marshal came to power in 2013.

The USD10 billion investment fund will be set up to develop the Neom megacity, with Egypt providing a long-term lease on the land in the south of the Sinai region where part of the project would be built. Saudi Arabia will provide cash to develop the Egyptian side of Neom. Egypt will commit more than 1000km² to the project, with plans in place to expand the economic zone into Jordan.

Egypt has already relinquished ownership of two Red Sea islands that are understood to be part of the Neom project under a controversial border agreement. Egypt and Saudi Arabia also signed an agreement to protect the environments of the Red Sea as they prepare to start construction on the project. Saudi Arabia wants to build a bridge over the Gulf of Aqaba to connect the kingdom with the Sinai Peninsula.
Between 1 and 15 March 2018 Saudi Arabia’s Ministry of Health (MOH) reported 6 additional cases of MERS-CoV.

According to the MOH, the latest figures for 2018 bring the national total to 1,654 MERS-CoV cases, including 64 asymptomatic cases, 707 deaths and 7 patients still receiving treatment. On 5 January 2018, it was reported that a 57-year-old male died in Riyadh after being infected by MERS. Notably, accurate accounting of MERS-CoV cases remains generally difficult because of historically poor reporting by officials and slow international confirmation.

The US CDC maintains an “Alert - Level 2” travel advisory for Saudi Arabia due to the risk of MERS infection. The CDC’s “Alert – Level 2” advisory is the second of three advisory levels, notifying travelers of elevated risk at a destination, often associated with specific risk factors. This level also encourages travelers to take specific actions and emphasizes the need for travelers to enhance their usual health precautions - predominantly ensuring all vaccinations are current and diligence in personal health precautions, in the case of MERS. People with diabetes, renal failure, chronic lung disease, and immunocompromised persons are thought to be at highest risk and are advised to avoid contact with camels, consuming raw camel milk or camel urine, and eating meat that has not been properly cooked.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>EVENT</th>
<th>COMMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16 May – 15 Jun 2018</td>
<td>Ramadan*</td>
<td>Religious observance – reduced working hours for public sector and some commercial organizations</td>
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<tr>
<td>15 Jun 2018</td>
<td>Eid al-Fitr (End of Ramadan)*</td>
<td>Public and religious holiday – widespread office closures</td>
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<td>11 Sep – 12 Sep</td>
<td>Islamic New Year*</td>
<td>Public holiday</td>
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<tr>
<td>23 Sep</td>
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* Islamic holidays are often determined by local sightings of lunar phases; dates given are approximate.
About Constellis

Saudi Arabia Bi-Weekly Summary

Constellis is a leading provider of risk management, protective security, crisis management and enabling support services to governments, international organisations and major corporations across the globe. We specialize in serving the energy, construction, extractives, critical infrastructure, development and national security sectors—assisting our clients in understanding risk and in conducting their operations safely and securely, no matter their location. Constellis takes pride in our strict adherence to an exacting code of ethics and rigorous focus on standards and compliance—reinforcing the pioneering role we play in fostering stability, efficiency and sustainable economic development.

Representing client interests around the world, we maintain operations in more than 25 countries as well as a global network of strategic and local partners. Connected via our state-of-the-art operations command and control centres, we provide a rapid response capability spanning North America, Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Asia. Constellis is headquartered in just outside Washington, D.C. in the United States, and possesses regional offices in the UAE, UK, Afghanistan, Iraq, Nigeria and Kenya. The core values underpinning our operating philosophy are the provision of international best practices while conducting all activities with respect for people, cultures and traditions; to uphold the principles of integrity, reliability and trust; to build capacity through knowledge transfer and to strengthen and empower local economies and communities.

Ultimately, our commitment is to prioritize local talent and local suppliers and to develop a profound understanding of the societal, legislative and operational situation ‘on the ground’. This affords us and our clients a unique freedom of movement and enables us to create safe and secure environments in a discrete and sustainable manner.

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For more information on this report please contact:

James Borrelli  
Programme Director  
James.Borrelli@constellis.com

For all enquiries on Constellis’ advisory & consulting services please contact:

Mark Allison  
Vice President Crisis and Risk Services  
Mark.Allison@constellis.com

www.constellis.com