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**Listserv Summary: Faculty/Staff Travel to Saudi Arabia**

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**March 2015**

An inquiry was made as to how other schools address the security situation for faculty or staff travel to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, given recent embassy closures, travel warnings, and the security situation within the country. The query also asked for what it would take for schools to cancel all faculty/staff trips to the country. The context of the question referred to a specific conference, but answers often spoke more generally towards travel to regions with security issues.

**Summary of responses:**

There were six responses to this email.

Two responses referenced the specific conference, with respondents stating they were planning to attend despite the current security situation. Both said that they, their colleagues, and their institutions—and in one case an OSAC analyst—were monitoring the situation closely.

A third responded that (s)he was planning to attend the conference because of the strong security presence at the specific conference referenced, stating “The fair is usually protected by the Royal Police and there are metal detectors and luggage scanners at the doors. Last year the opening security was so strict that I had to fight to make my way in. I doubt if the US embassy has closed - they have probably suspended consular operations. Which in turn will be a partly political gesture to put pressure on the Saudi authorities to round-up the ISIS supporters. I do not want to diminish the threat from ISIS which, is explicitly supported by some Saudis (much to the annoyance of the King I should think) but my current thinking is that I have a higher chance of being killed by ISIS in the other Arabic states (where security is more lax). So I shall attend.”

One response stated that the respondent often travels to Iran, where there are no US diplomatic missions.

One response went into more detail about the nature of the specific alert in question, stating “The alert you referenced was for canceling of Consular services. That happens quite frequently in this part of the world. In Turkey, where I live, it occurs when specific threats are identified or after an attempt/attack has been made. I have not read about any attacks on the US missions, so they must have specific intel. The political situation between US and Saudi is not extremely favorable, particularly with the hardliners, so it is not surprising that this occurred and I would expect more closures of this nature in the future. Even though no outsiders are allowed to come

for appointments, the officials at embassy and consulates are still showing up to work. I would not cancel my trip because of that situation. I would cancel if the entire mission closed up. Do you have any contacts with a security company? Most corporate workers traveling to Saudi work with an agency that provides various levels of security services including a SAT phone, emergency services, evacuation. They can even talk to a cab driver through your phone to make sure you are going to the correct place. You pay for those things, but for a short trip, it may be worth it for your safety and peace of mind. I absolutely would not go without a satellite phone and evacuation plan/insurance. I can refer you to this company: iJet ( [www.iJET.com](http://www.iJET.com)) I met the owner/COO at conference in London. He has worked with the student evacuations and has a link with Terra Dotta/Studio Abroad so he is familiar with our industry. He is former military and is extremely knowledgeable about working in the ME. “

One response went into detail about the background of this particular situation:

There has been a growing concern about the situation in Saudi Arabia. Over the past several months, there has been a growing concern about ISIL’s interest in conducting attacks in Saudi Arabia, which has traditionally been a popular target with Islamist extremist organizations. ISIL has made statements indicating an intent to conduct attacks in the country, and numerous incidents in the past few months indicate that individual sympathizers or members may be conducting low-level attacks (largely shootings).

- October 2014: two US nationals working for Vinnel Arabia (subsidiary of Northrup Grumman) shot, one killed, at a gas station in Riyadh
- November 2014: A Danish citizen was shot and injured while leaving his place of work in Riyadh. ISIL released a video claiming responsibility.
- November 2014: eight people killed in attack on Shi’a place of worship in Al Hasa, Eastern Province. Authorities attribute the attack to ISIL
- November 2014: A Canadian national is stabbed at a shopping mall in Dhahran. Authorities say the man responsible is emotionally disturbed.
- January 2015: ISIL attacks Saudi border guards along the Iraq-Saudi border.
- February 2015: Two American employees for Vinnel Arabia are shot while driving in Al Hasa, Eastern province; no casualties reported.

The Embassy’s suspension of consular services has increased the concerns about the terrorism threat in country. Thus far, we are highlighting to constituents that the Security Messages do not indicate any specific threat towards the U.S. private sector or U.S. community in Saudi Arabia at large, but that the language specifically says “due to heightened concerns at U.S. diplomatic facilities” indicating the information may be specific to USG interests. Saudi authorities have demonstrated an ability to disrupt large terrorist operations and foil complex, coordinated attacks. This may explain why we have been seeing primarily shootings of Western nationals at vulnerable points – largely while driving to locations they frequented: gas stations, places of work, etc. We have confidence that the Saudi authorities are closely monitoring the situation and can continue to disrupt significant plots, but will likely to have a difficult time countering lone-wolf style attacks similar to the incidents listed above.”