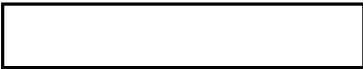




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Central Intelligence



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Worldwide Threat to US Diplomatic Missions Resulting From the Situation in Iran

Interagency Intelligence Memorandum

Secret

*NI IIM 79-10024
21 November 1979*

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WORLDWIDE THREAT TO US DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS
RESULTING FROM THE SITUATION IN IRAN

PRINCIPAL JUDGMENTS

1. A serious risk of additional attacks on US diplomatic missions* and personnel exists virtually throughout the Middle East and South Asia and would increase substantially in the event of hostilities between the United States and Iran. The likelihood of such actions seems to be the highest in the small Persian Gulf states, where the security services are generally weak; in Lebanon, where civil disorder is endemic; and perhaps in Syria, where security has deteriorated in recent months and the government is backing Iran's anti-US actions. The risk will be highest through 18 December, the end of the Muslim month of mourning, Moharram.

2. Local security services in the region vary widely in their ability and determination to protect US interests against attack. Most could deal successfully with anti-US demonstrations. Unless they were forewarned, however, few if any could prevent a determined effort by an armed group to seize a US embassy. Only Libya might condone or organize a popular occupation of the US Embassy, although it would probably seek to prevent violence.

3. Outside the Middle East, the risk of violent anti-US actions appears greatest in Western Europe, where there are thousands of Iranian students as well as indigenous anti-US and antigovernment radical groups. West European security services are, of course, highly capable and determined to prevent attacks on US missions.

NOTE: This Interagency Intelligence Memorandum was prepared in the Office of Political Analysis, National Foreign Assessment Center, under the auspices of the National Intelligence Officer for the Near East and South Asia. It was coordinated at the working level with the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State, the Defense Intelligence Agency, and with the intelligence staffs of the Departments of Army, Navy, and Air Force.

*DIA wishes to stress that many of the points in this assessment of the threat to US diplomatic missions also apply to other US installations, facilities, and bases abroad.

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DISCUSSION

Middle East and South Asia*

4. US diplomatic personnel and missions throughout the Middle East and South Asia are highly vulnerable to attacks by disaffected groups and individuals. Events in Iran, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia have the potential to inspire violent anti-US actions not only by Shia Islamic groups, but also by fanatic Sunni Muslim factions and by the many radical secular opposition and terrorist groups across the political spectrum that might be tempted to join in the spreading anti-Americanism.

5. The threat seems to be most immediate in those states where Shia Muslims responsive to Khomeini comprise a sizable proportion of the population or constitute a chronic domestic political problem. In addition to Iran this would include the Arab states on the Persian Gulf and Lebanon. Serious security problems exist in Lebanon, Syria, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, and this adds to the overall risk to US missions in those countries. Similarly, statements supportive of Iran's anti-US actions made by the governments of Libya, Syria, and South Yemen can only increase the likelihood of anti-US actions in the area.

6. We have [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] no basis on which to predict the specific countries where such an attack might occur. In the relatively volatile Shia area, the danger will be especially high during the current Muslim month of mourning, Moharram, and it may increase still further if the situation in Iran continues to deteriorate. In the Arab world the likelihood of anti-US actions in general will increase somewhat early next year with the scheduled exchange of ambassadors between Israel and Egypt.

7. Virtually all governments in the area would attempt to prevent an attack on a US diplomatic mission. Libya might constitute an exception; the regime would likely

*At annex is a country-by-country threat assessment for the Middle East and South Asia that was not coordinated within the Intelligence Community because of time constraints.

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[REDACTED]

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attempt to prevent bloodshed, but might condone an occupation of the US Embassy. Area security services vary widely in their quality and in their determination to protect US interests. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] Most could deal successfully with popular demonstrations; few if any could prevent a determined, small group from attacking or seizing a US embassy.

Western Europe

8. US diplomatic missions and personnel in Western Europe seem especially vulnerable to attack, as there are in Western Europe thousands of Iranian students and a large number of indigenous radical groups. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] reports of [REDACTED] suggesting that Iranian students in Italy and France, for example, may take some action against the local American community. Demonstrations in front of the embassies and kidnaping of US officials have been mentioned as possibilities. We have nothing to indicate that either Iranians or European radicals are planning actions against US installations in countries other than Italy and France. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

9. Any decision by Iranian or other radical groups to move against a US target in Western Europe would have to be made in the face of countervailing considerations. The attempt would encounter stiff and almost certainly effective resistance from the local security forces, and public reaction would be unsympathetic or hostile. We therefore judge that the odds are against such an attempt. The likelihood of such action would increase, however, if the United States took military action against Iran.

USSR and Eastern Europe

10. There is virtually no chance of a takeover of the US Embassy in Moscow, the Consulate in Leningrad, or the advance party in Kiev. Soviet security for US facilities is adequate to deal with any action that visiting foreign students--the only conceivable disaffected element that could be inspired by events in Iran or Pakistan--might take. Anyone contemplating action against a US facility would know

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that Soviet security personnel would oppose the action forcibly. If the Soviet regime staged a demonstration against a US facility in reaction to US military moves threatening Iran, the "outraged citizens" would not be permitted to penetrate or take over the facility.

11. It is unlikely that any East European regime would allow foreign students to occupy a US installation. The East Europeans might permit an anti-US demonstration, but they would carefully control it. Tightened security is already apparent around some US installations. A surprise move against an American facility is possible, but the regimes would certainly respond quickly to protect US personnel. One country where it is conceivable that the government might not be able to prevent demonstrations and possible violence is Yugoslavia, where there are 3.8 million Muslims. Although we have no evidence of Khomeini's influence among Yugoslav Muslims, an anti-American move by small groups, possibly against the US Information Center in Sarajevo, cannot be ruled out.

Asia

12. Dissident political groups in most of East Asia are unlikely to seize on current developments in the Middle East as cause to attack US diplomatic missions or personnel. There are several possible exceptions, however, in Southeast Asia. The Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand all have disaffected non-Shia Muslim elements; these groups saw the Iranian revolution as an example of how devout Muslims could overwhelm a seemingly more powerful secular government. Muslims in the Philippines and Thailand are engaged in armed separatist rebellions. Both Philippine and Thai Muslims have engaged in terrorist acts against government installations, but thus far not against American targets. Action by a small group of radical Muslims against a US embassy, consulate, or binational center could not be ruled out in any of the five countries cited.

Latin America

13. El Salvador probably presents the most serious threat of an embassy takeover by dissidents in Latin America, although there is little likelihood that such an attempt would be precipitated by events in the Middle East. Terrorist-controlled leftist organizations have employed takeovers of government buildings and international offices

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over the past two years, most recently holding two government ministers and several dozen others hostage. Leftists have made one attack against the US Embassy and plan others.

Sub-Saharan Africa

14. The risk of a takeover of a US embassy or consulate in Sub-Saharan Africa as a result of events in Pakistan and Iran is judged to be low. Even in those places where bilateral relations are strained--such as Ethiopia--the local governments have provided adequate protection for US diplomatic posts in the past. Anti-US demonstrations occur periodically, but they usually are stage-managed and kept within bounds by the authorities. There are some countries--Chad and Uganda being the best examples--where government control is tenuous and the existence of numerous armed factions and gangs makes the safety of US facilities somewhat more unpredictable. If the London conference on Zimbabwe-Rhodesia were to collapse over perceptions that Britain--and, by extension, the United States--is attempting to force a settlement that merely legitimizes the current Salisbury regime, students in several African states, notably Nigeria and Zambia, might be attracted to the example set by their counterparts in Iran and Pakistan.

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