

The Real Terrorist Threat in the Gulf by *Edward V. Badolato.*

As the US moves toward a military showdown with Iraq, the counterterrorism community should seriously consider the real threats to US interests, both in the Gulf and worldwide. The US government through Secretary of State Albright has stated that the objective of military actions against Iraq would be to "diminish the ability of Saddam Hussein to make weapons of mass destruction." However, US intelligence estimates that 20 nations, including Iran, are also actively developing similar weapons, yet we have not made any threats to bomb Iran.

Although Tehran has recently projected a more temperate image by electing a new president, the relatively moderate, Mohammad Khatami, Iran is still the world's most active supporter of international terrorism. When I hear an Iranian leader described as a moderate, it reminds me of the definition that an Iranian moderate "is a mullah that has run out of ammunition."

Major issues between the US and Iran includes terrorism, human rights, the Middle East peace process and production of weapons of mass destruction. According to a recent conversation I had with a senior State Department official, "the US is currently hoping for a reduction in terrorism activities allegedly sponsored by Iran, and reduced Iranian opposition to the Arab-Israeli peace process."

Today, there remains deep anger and concern among many counterterrorism experts over alleged Iranian involvement in worldwide terrorism, including strong suspicions about the Khobar Towers bombing in Saudi Arabia that killed 19 Americans. Unfortunately, the Iranian connection appears to have been relegated to the back burner by the current focus on Saddam Hussein.

Iran continues to use its intelligence agents to ruthlessly operate against dissidents abroad, and it maintains its support and financing of international terrorist groups that continue to pose a threat to US citizens. The Director of the CIA, George J. Tenet, told Congress that Iran will seek the increased use of terrorism and the development of weapons of mass destruction "in order to subvert or intimidate our allies, undermine the confidence of our friends and allies in our military presence, and eventually expel us from the region." Director Tenet went on to say that Iran "is building its capabilities to produce and deliver weapons of mass destruction -- chemical, biological, and nuclear -- and in less than 10 years probably will have longer range missiles that will enable it to target most of Saudi Arabia and Israel. Iran sees terrorism as a useful tool."

Iran continues to sponsor terrorism training in the Middle East and African regions and provides millions of dollars to a variety of militant Islamic groups opposed to the peace process. For example, the Iranian-backed Lebanese Hezbollah persists in posing a serious terrorist threat to Western interests, as does Iranian support for the various other radical organizations involved in terrorism, such as HAMAS, the Palestine Islamic Jihad (PIJ), the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestinian General Command (PFLP-GC), and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

Iranian-backed Hezbollah groups are now strategically placed in key areas around the world where they are quietly prepared to commit serious acts of terrorism at the command of Tehran similar to the July 1994 bombing of a Jewish cultural center in Buenos Aires. For example, South African security experts are concerned that their country could experience serious terrorist problems as a result of the Hezbollah cells, which have been quietly placed there.

With the foregoing in mind, it will be useful for the counterterrorism community to more closely examine Iranian terrorism activities, and a more extensive report on this topic will be published in the next issue of Counterterrorism and Security Magazine.

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