



SPECIAL ADVISORY

Potential Iranian Retaliation Against US Targets

January 2, 2020

Situation

Over the past several days, a series of events involving the US and Iran have escalated rapidly:

- On December 27, 2019 an American contractor was killed in a rocket attack on a US military facility in Kirkuk, Iraq.
- On December 29, 2019 US airstrikes attacked three targets in Iraq and two targets in Syria reportedly controlled by Iranian proxy militia groups.
- On December 31, 2019 militia groups reportedly supported by Iran attacked the US Embassy in Baghdad. The US responded by deploying approximately 750 ground troops to Baghdad and flying missions with attack helicopters over the city.
- On January 2, 2020 US Defense Secretary Esper made public comments that the US “could take pre-emptive action against Iran.”
- On January 2, 2020 deputy head of Hashed Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis and Quds Force head Qasem Soleimani were killed just outside the Baghdad airport in a strike by US forces ordered by President Trump.

Assessment

The likelihood of Iranian retaliation for the January 2 events is high. Although military and other governmental sites in the region are certainly at risk, attacks on US targets and interests globally are possible, if not likely. These could range from sophisticated Iranian-directed attacks to more spontaneous attacks by self-radicalized persons sympathetic to Iran (or with other anti-US jihadi sentiments). Especially for the latter case, attacks against soft US-linked targets within the US and overseas are both foreseeable. Soft targets include Christian places of worship, meetings, events and conferences.

Recommendations

1. Christian churches, organizations, mission facilities, events and conferences should actively seek all current information concerning this threat. Media, government and private sources should be monitored.
2. These organizations should increase their awareness of potential pre-attack surveillance or actions that might be committed by potential attackers. Any suspicious activity, or persons, should be documented and reported to law enforcement immediately.

3. Higher-profile Christian institutions, organizations and events should review their security profile and procedures. Consideration should be given to increasing visible and deterrent security measures until this threat can be more fully assessed or passes.
4. US and partnering faith-based sending organizations should take similar measures for their facilities and personnel worldwide. Greater attention and action is warranted in regions physically or ideologically closer to Iran and its proxies.
5. Organizations supporting Iranian dual-national, faith-based workers should consider evacuating those workers and their immediate families from Iran (if possible) and indefinitely delaying the return of such workers to Iran. In the case the return of such a worker is delayed, strong consideration to evacuation of that worker's family members from Iran, if possible, should be given.

Crisis Consulting International is available to advise and support Christian faith-based organizations in responding to this and other threats. Contact us at (805) 642-2549 or by email directly to the author at rklamser@cricon.org.