



# Hardening Overseas Presence: Force Protection

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Khobar Towers,  
Dhahran.

U.S. Air Force (Sean Worrell)

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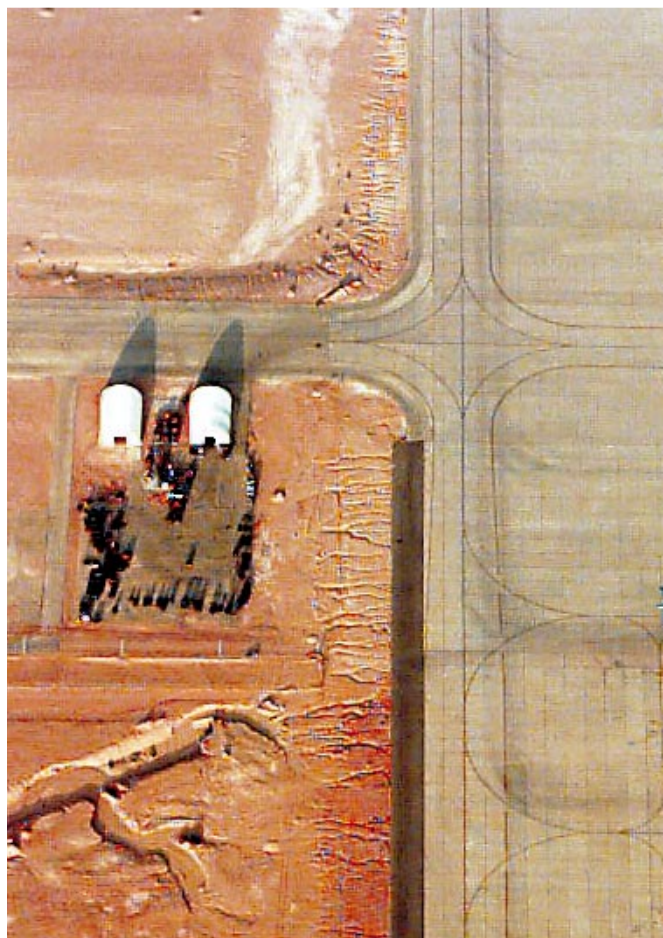
Attacks on the Office of the Program Manager/Saudi Arabia National Guard (OPM/SANG) in November 1995 and on the Khobar Towers living compound in June 1996 forever changed the way in which the Armed Forces will regard terrorism in the Persian Gulf. Both bombings also served to prove that regional security dynamics can have an impact on U.S. forces deployed in the area.

To deter and prevent hostile acts, air activities were moved from King Abd Al-Aziz air base in Dhahran and Riyadh air base to Prince Sultan air base adjacent to the city of Al Kharj, south of Riyadh. The rationale for this shift was to move forces from populated areas, where perpetrators of terrorist acts could easily disappear, to locales where space and terrain could be used to advantage.

The relocation to Prince Sultan air base means that many American personnel have traded in their furnished villas for tents and trailers which eventually will be replaced by modular housing. Similar security precautions took place in the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait as U.S. personnel moved from the Sahara Residency in downtown Abu Dhabi onto Al Dhafra air base outside the city and from the international airport at Kuwait City onto Ahmed Al Jabber air base in the desert.

It should be noted, however, that space and terrain are not always viable force protection options and that various measures must be implemented in different locations, contingent upon the mission and its requirements. U.S. personnel who remain located in urban areas have attempted to disperse into the local environment (such as hotels and residential areas) to provide a more difficult target while simultaneously integrating and becoming better acquainted with local populations.

While these actions have been reactive in nature, proactive measures also have been taken. The bombings of the OPM/SANG facility and Khobar Towers had a number of ramifications for American officials involved in ensuring



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Prince Sultan air base  
at Kharj, Saudi Arabia.

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Security measures at Prince Sultan air base.

the safety and security of deployed personnel. The most obvious was that the threat of terrorism in southwest Asia was evolving and that active measures were needed to indicate to both friend and foe that future acts of anti-U.S. terrorism would be neither easy nor without cost.

One issue that surfaced immediately was the requirement for a new approach to combating terrorism. Security measures had to be changed in the wake of the bombings; new paradigms had to be brought into play. Recognizing this issue, a Force Protection Directorate was created within Joint Task Force-Southwest Asia (JTF-SWA) in Riyadh. The overriding objective was to provide a focal point for force protection related issues as well as provide policy and guidance to field units to ensure that corrective measures for security vulnerabilities were implemented in a timely fashion. Although traditionally regarded as a wartime concern, force protection now has become so critical that all operational planning takes it into consideration.

The Force Protection Directorate was established to fuse counterintelligence and terrorism related threat data with the appropriate physical security defensive and offensive countermeasures. By analyzing information about the plans of potential terrorists, saboteurs, and spies, the directorate seeks to proactively counter the threat. This is accomplished through hardening likely targets and increasing overt and covert security measures to discourage and preempt terrorists from carrying out an attack.

The JTF-SWA commander, who also serves as Air Forces Central Command (CENTAF) forward commander, was initially granted force protection authority over Air Force personnel, facilities, and equipment in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility. Force protection now has been divided along component lines. Moreover, policies are being developed to incorporate the findings of the Downing Commission and other recent assessments.

The position of deputy director for combating terrorism (J-34), Joint Staff, was established on October 15, 1996 as the DOD focal point for antiterrorism and force protection. His mission is to support the Chairman in combating terrorism—now and into the next century.

At present there is a great deal of emphasis on force protection which is evolving in terms of both concepts and implementation. Using a multi-disciplinary approach, force protection efforts are focused on a number of areas including counterintelligence, physical security, communications, explosives, information dissemination, and liaison. Although still in the developmental stage, this comprehensive approach holds a great promise for the conduct of operations and support activities.

In the wake of the recent bombings in Saudi Arabia, there have been renewed efforts by the Armed Forces to establish even closer liaison on security matters with host nation counterparts at local and national level. These contacts not only increase understanding between U.S. forces and other nations but also facilitate the exchange of threat information. The objective is to effectively cooperate with our host nation counterparts in safeguarding lives and resources.

Force protection has arrived as an organizational concept at the JTF level. The success of the Force Protection Directorate at JTF-SWA will determine to a large extent how it will be implemented in future deployments in other regions of the world.

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