

24 February 2005

SAUDI EMBASSY SECURITY

Due to pressure of other commitments, I will make only a few observations in response to your query about the security issues posed by the development of a seven-storey structure at the Embassy motel site:

- It would seem that the upper storeys would provide a good view of the Saudi embassy compound. This in turn would allow covert surveillance of the compound and, possibly, a vantage point for a sniper.
- Saudi Arabia has an internal security problem with an Al Qaeda affiliated group, as well as a population that seems generally alienated at the way in which the monarchy rules the country.
- There are probably anti-regime Saudi expatriate elements in Australia.
- The Al Qaeda network has global reach but limited capability at present to mount attacks in Australia. To date it has not targeted Saudi Arabia's diplomatic premises or staff internationally.
- The authoritative US National Intelligence Council (NIC) has recently projected a worsening in the Islamist extremist situation internationally in the period to 2020.
- There are also other security issues unrelated to politically motivated violence that should be considered.

In sum, from a security perspective there would seem to be valid grounds for concern - particularly over the longer term.

For a more considered report that would involve an on-site inspection and discussion with other security specialists, I would need to take this matter on as a paid consultancy. Alternatively, you may wish to approach ASIO for an assessment.

Clive Williams MG
Strategic and Defence Studies Centre
The Australian National University
(02) 6125 9936