**The Iranian threat hits home**

*Following attacks on Israeli embassies overseas, JointMedia News Service gathered perspectives from around the U.S. on the possibility of Iran as a domestic terror threat.*

By Jacob Kamaras/JointMedia News Service

Amid analysis of the Iranian nuclear threat and how America should respond on a national level, the recent attacks on Israeli embassies in India and Georgia have Jewish institutions around the U.S. asking a question that is much closer to home: Does Iran pose a local terror threat?

“Homeland security really starts as security in the neighborhood,” Paul Goldenberg, national director of the Jewish Federations of North America-affiliated Secure Community Network (SCN), told JointMedia News Service.

**The national Jewish security perspective**

SCN, which partners with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and 56 major Jewish organizations, is asking Jewish organizations “to remain vigilant, to ensure that they have tested their [emergency management and response] plans,” and, if they do not have plans, to develop them, Goldenberg said.

“It’s a matter of record that Jewish institutions in the Diaspora have been attacked by both proxies of Iran as well as other extremist and terrorist organizations,” he said.

While there is “no specific or imminent threat against the American-Jewish community” at this juncture, according to Goldenberg, he said it is possible that “some lone wolf, some cell out there, is plotting and planning, and law enforcement doesn’t know about it.”

Though he said an attack by Iran isn’t necessarily “likely,” the October 2011 assassination attempt on the Saudi Arabian ambassador in Washington suggests Iran is “not beyond setting its sights on targets within the U.S. homeland,” said Ilan Berman, vice president of the Washington, DC-based American Foreign Policy Council.

Berman said “you’ve seen Iran strike Jewish targets in the Western hemisphere before,” citing bombings in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in both 1992 and 1994. More recently, he said there has been “a significant shift in Iranian strategy in terms of its willingness to target the U.S. homeland.”

“I wouldn’t necessarily say that Jewish targets are the most likely targets, but they certainly should be part of the calculation as you think about an increasingly emboldened Iran that’s willing to strike out against targets in the U.S. homeland,” Berman told JointMedia News Service. “They’re certainly in the mix.”

**The local perspective: Jewish and law enforcement officials weigh in**

Rabbi Michael Siegel, leader of Anshe Emet Synagogue in **Chicago**, said he is “definitely concerned” about the Iranian threat.

“When there are open discussions about the threat of Iran attacking Jewish targets, we would be foolish not to pay attention,” he said.

Jewish institutions in **New Jersey** were spurred to consider security upgrades after a recent string of anti-Semitic events in Bergen County, and the recent attacks linked to Iran represent more of the same to Jason Shames, chief executive officer of the Jewish Federation of Northern New Jersey.

“Concern in the Jewish community about local anti-Semitism or a local threat and Iran are essentially one and the same; making yourself more secure against local anti-Semitism threats will also make you more secure against threats that Iran may try to perpetrate,” Shames said.

Barry Morrison, the Anti-Defamation League’s regional director in **Philadelphia**, said, “Persistence and perseverance are needed to prevent terrorism—something institutions do not always keep in mind.” Morrison said cooperation from local rabbis has been “mixed.” Many are “aware and appreciative” and cooperate by reporting incidents, but in some cases “they are not that open, not willing to share information, causing a significant detriment to our efforts.”

Karen Kuwayti, director of interactive marketing for the Combined Jewish Philanthropies (CJP) of **Boston**, said CJP is “encouraging [local] organizations to remain vigilant.”

“What [security] plans they have in place or measures they take is up to the individual organization,” Kuwayti said.

Howard Lesner, executive director of Temple Sinai in **Los Angeles**, said, “If al Qaida should decide to target [us], there is little that can be done. But 99 percent of the crackpots—when they see security—move on to the next target.”

“Presence makes the difference,” said Lesner. “We are very proactive. A community can’t spend enough money to protect its greatest assets—its children.”

James Dudley, deputy chief of the **San Francisco** Police Department Special Operations Bureau, said he “cannot speculate, comment or give out information that may not be in our best interests. Suffice to say that we are aware of our resources that need protecting here in San Francisco; we try to keep ‘situational awareness’ in regards to world issues and conflicts and increase staffing in times when the needs arise.”

In **New York City**, close to 1,000 police officers have been assigned to counterterrorism duties, working in the city and other locations, some quite distant. New York Police Department (NYPD) Deputy Commissioner Paul J. Browne has stated that, “The NYPD adjusts its counterterrorism posture to include information about events overseas.”

“We cannot slack in our vigilance,” Mayor Michael Bloomberg has said, adding that the threat of local terrorism is “real” and that it “is not going away.”

Art Abramson, executive director of the **Baltimore** Jewish Council, said, “Those responsible for protecting Jewish institutions are always aware of security issues.”

“This is another one and we are taking all necessary precautions to keep our institutions safe,” he said. “We have a long tradition of doing what we have to do, and we are alert, and we talk to the law enforcement community and the Israeli embassy.”

**What steps can Jewish institutions take?**

The SCN’s Goldenberg said Jewish institutions should be training their staff and volunteers in security awareness, while being be very cognizant of suspicious activities and reporting them to local police. To that end, the SCN website ([www.scnus.org](http://www.scnus.org)) has an “Enter” section on its homepage providing free 24/7 online security training.

SCN’s online training is the “only one of its kind in the country,” Goldenberg said, and includes information on how to respond to an active shooter, security awareness, how to handle a suspicious package, and how to answer a bomb call.

The Jewish community “should not be panicked,” he said, but instead needs to “remain open for business.”

“We’re not stores,” Goldenberg said. “We’re places where people come to pray, people come to socialize, people come for social services from our community.”

“As long as the situation in the Mideast remains the way it does at this point,” he added, “we are asking our communities to remain very vigilant in how they are conducting business.”

*—With reporting from Alina Dain Sharon, Michele Alperin, Maxine Dovere, Susie Davidson and Paul Foer.*