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Seizures of Western Diplomatic Facilities

Historical Timelines, 1979–2019

When local or international crises occur around the world, American and allied diplomatic facilities are frequent targets of contention and violence. As the most visible symbols of Western governments and their policies, such diplomatic facilities are also common targets of international terrorist organizations.

To develop effective response capabilities, it is necessary to know the timelines under which response forces will need to operate. Specifically, a response will be effective only if it occurs before the attack culminates. We conducted a review of attacks on Western diplomatic facilities as part of a larger project that analyzed possible responses to attacks on U.S. diplomatic facilities. To assess the parameters of an effective response, we reviewed all historical attacks on Western diplomatic facilities over the past four decades and identified any relevant trends in the timelines of those attacks.

We found that the trends confirm the need for a three-tiered planning approach consisting of Early Security Augmentation, Anticipatory Security Augmentation, and In Extremis Response.

KEY FINDINGS

- There have been 33 successful seizures of Western diplomatic facilities since 1979, outside of areas of active armed conflict involving U.S. or allied contingency forces.
- The majority of attacks culminated in two hours or less, and over 90 percent culminated in six hours or less.
- In the past decade, however, the median attack duration was four hours, and the average was 4.8 hours. The lengthening of this duration could offer wider windows of opportunity to intervene.
- The median period of time for indications of elevated risk remained consistent at 2.5 days. There were two or more days of warning for nearly 60 percent of successful seizures.
- The historical timelines for attacks on diplomatic facilities indicate the need for a three-tiered planning approach consisting of Early Security Augmentation, Anticipatory Security Augmentation, and In Extremis Response. U.S. Department of Defense capabilities apply primarily to the latter two tiers.

Methodology

We compiled data on all embassy seizures that were either fully or partially successful from 1979 to 2019. We defined a partially or fully successful seizure as *an attack in which the perpetrators breached the compound or facility security perimeter with the intent to occupy the facility or do damage or harm to its property and/or personnel*. We excluded attacks that ended immediately—such as bombings, shootings, and

assassinations—because response forces could not intervene in a meaningful way in such cases. We limited our cases to those that involved five or more assailants. We did not go back further than 1979, because embassy security measures changed significantly after the Iran hostage crisis. We included only Western diplomatic facilities, because security standards at non-U.S. Western facilities are fairly comparable to those at U.S. facilities. With these parameters in mind, we determined that there were 33 partially or fully successful seizures of Western diplomatic facilities from 1979 to 2019.¹

In none of the cases that we examined did planned response forces, particularly In Extremis Response forces (such as a Commander's In Extremis Force, Crisis Response Force, Fleet Antiterrorism Security Team platoon, or other U.S.-Based Special Operations Forces) arrive before the attack culmination.² Marine Security Guards (MSGs), Bureau of Diplomatic Security personnel, other routine security augmentation forces, and local security forces did play significant roles in defending against many of the attacks we analyzed. (Statistically speaking, our results are not “right-censored,” since our analysis focused on timelines for effective Anticipatory Security Augmentation and In Extremis Response, and the corresponding forces for those responses did not arrive within the relevant time windows in any of the cases.)

We measured the attack timelines in two ways: (1) the duration of each attack and (2) any advance warning prior to each attack. First, we calculated the duration of each attack. Because of uncertainty in the exact start and end times of the attacks, we estimated the attack timelines in one-hour increments; however, if sufficiently specific data were available, we estimated the attack timelines in 30-minute

¹ To compile this dataset, we used a variety of public and government-produced sources. We searched newsprint articles, declassified cables and CIA reports, academic journals, think tank reports, U.S. Department of State and embassy websites, press releases, after action reports, situation reports, spot reports, and terrorism analysis reports.

² During the attack on the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi, Team Tripoli did respond and played a critical role in defending against further attacks. However, Team Tripoli was not a planned response force, and its existence was not known at the time to the Secretary of Defense.

increments. We called this time period “attack initiation to culmination.” We measured this period from the time the attack began to the point at which the arrival of response forces would no longer make a difference—that is, the point of culmination. The point of culmination occurs when the status of the facility and of all diplomatic personnel has been fully resolved. For the facility, culmination means either (1) friendly forces are in full control of the facility and the attack has ceased or (2) the attackers are in full control of the facility. For diplomatic personnel, culmination means they are either (1) in friendly custody, (2) in hostile custody, or (3) deceased. Figure 1 shows the estimated attack timelines for each of the 33 successful attacks.

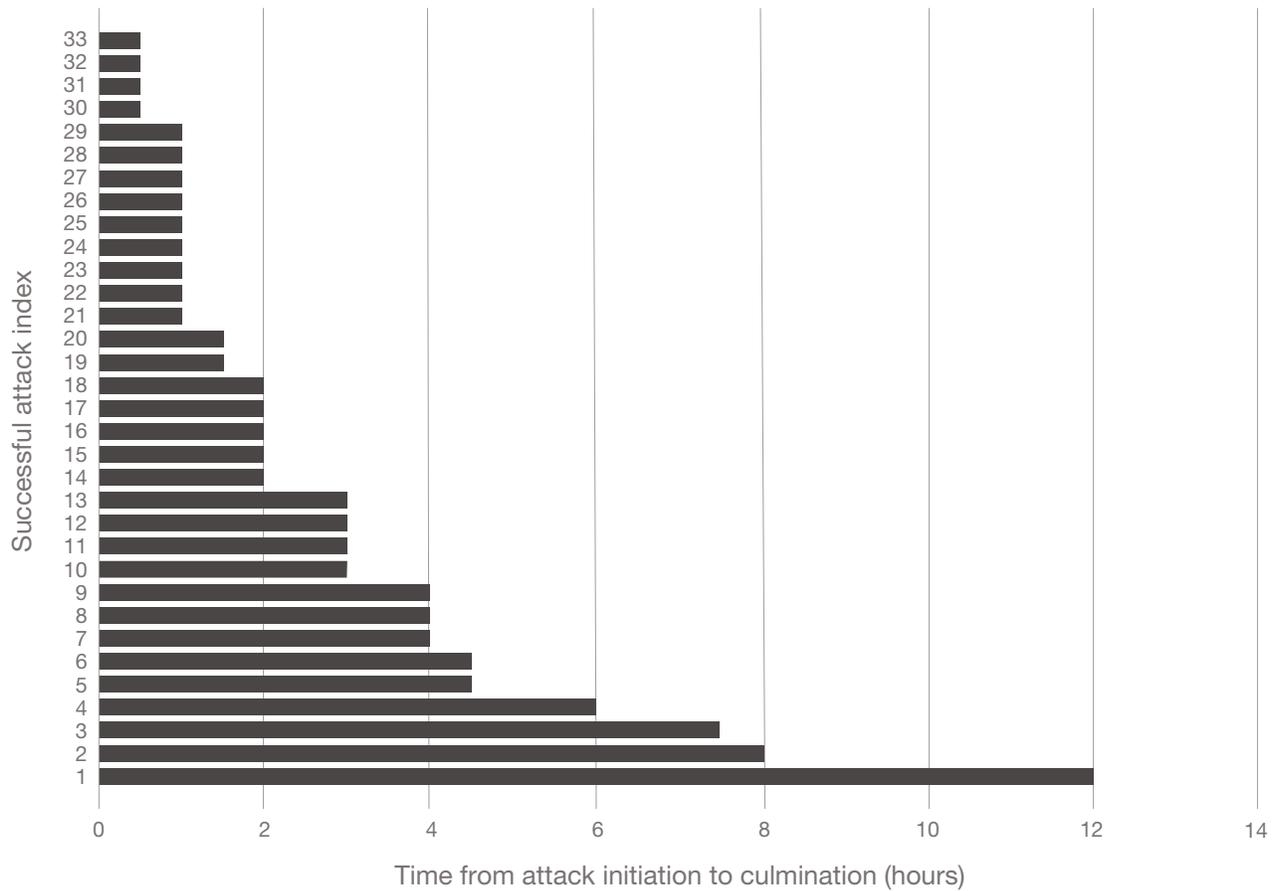
Second, we measured how much advance warning officials had, in days, before an attack occurred. We called this time period “indication of elevated risk.” We based this measure on official government or publicly available reports warning of increased risk. Data on this measure were available for 32 of the 33 cases of successful attacks.

In measuring indication of elevated risk, we looked at when information was available to indicate an increased risk, as well as when government officials acted to mitigate and/or acknowledged the increased risk. In many cases, embassy personnel were placed on mandatory or voluntary departures in advance of attacks. In some cases, additional MSGs or Diplomatic Security agents were sent in to bolster security. While these measures were taken into consideration in the analysis of each individual case, data were not available in enough of the cases (only 18 of the 33) to include them in a statistical analysis. The details are described in the narratives below where pertinent, and we took them into consideration in our qualitative analyses of each case.

We excluded cases of embassy seizures in countries where there were ongoing, named, U.S., or allied military contingency operations. We assessed the security posture and threat situation of these incidents to be distinctly different than those of other embassy attack-and-response scenarios.

The next section describes the 33 attacks in chronological order. There are two cases of two simultaneous attacks. Each description identifies both the attack initiation to culmination and the

FIGURE 1
Timelines of Successful Attacks



indication of elevated risk. The concluding sections briefly summarize the timeline trends associated with these attacks and the implications for a three-tiered planning approach.

Descriptions of the 33 Successful Seizures

U.S. Embassy, Tehran—February 14, 1979



The lead-up to the first successful seizure of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran began on December 24,

1978, when a mob attempted to storm the embassy, prompting MSGs to fire tear gas (Associated Press, 2019). At this point, U.S. Ambassador William Sullivan requested and received six additional MSGs, and he replaced the local security outside the wall with MSGs (Daugherty, 2009, p. 222). As of January 16, 1979, the U.S. Department of State (DoS) had documented growing anti-U.S. sentiment, following reports of the Shah’s departure (DoS, 1979f). Tensions continued to rise with the February 1 return of Ayatollah Khomeini to Tehran. On the morning of February 14, the embassy attack began when an MSG noticed an intruder on the gatehouse roof at 10:00 a.m. local time. By 10:15 a.m., attackers had begun scaling the embassy walls (Gage, 1979). Only 15 minutes later, at 10:30 a.m., the ambassador ordered the MSGs to cease fire and deploy tear gas, while instructing all embassy personnel to retreat to the top floor. By 11:15 a.m., just one hour and 15 minutes

after the attack had started, the ambassador surrendered the embassy to the militants, even though marines were reportedly still fighting from the warehouse at 11:37 a.m. The attack culminated around noon, when Iranian Deputy Prime Minister Ebrahim Yadiz arrived on scene with pro-Khomeini forces and drove off the attackers, returning the embassy to U.S. control. All told, the ambassador and nearly 100 embassy staff had been held hostage for close to two hours, during which time one local employee was killed and two marines were wounded (Jenkins, p. 33, 1981).

French Embassy, San Salvador— May 4, 1979



Following months of rising political tensions, the French Embassy in San Salvador was overrun by 16 armed members of the Popular Revolutionary Bloc (BPR) within 15 minutes on the afternoon of May 4, 1979 (Jenkins, p. 34, 1981; DoS, 1979a, 1979b). The attack culminated in approximately 30 minutes or less. BPR militants also seized the Costa Rican Embassy on the same day, later seized the Venezuelan Embassy, attempted to seize the South African Embassy, and assassinated the Swiss Chargé d’Affaires in San Salvador. The attacks were waged to gain leverage for the release of BPR members who had been arrested between February 24 and April 25 (DoS, 1979b, 1979c). By April 23, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had warned of increased threats in San Salvador (CIA, 1979), and on May 1—three days before the first embassy seizures—the BPR had held a large rally protesting the arrests. The hostages from the French Embassy were eventually released on June 1 after Mexico granted political asylum to BPR members.

U.S. Embassy, San Salvador— October 30, 1979



As violence and unrest grew throughout 1979, DoS warned on October 11 of the most serious threat to diplomatic installations in San Salvador to date, following an armed attack on a U.S. Peace Corps facility (DoS, 1979d, 1979e). On October 15, the government of El Salvador was overthrown in a coup. On October 30, approximately 300 leftist militants stormed the U.S. Embassy compound and scaled the walls but failed to breach the chancery. MSGs and Salvadoran troops used tear gas to repel the attack, which culminated in approximately 45 minutes. Two marines were injured in the attack (*New York Times*, 1979a; Daugherty, 2009, p. 215).

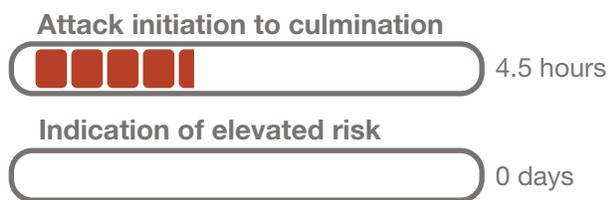
U.S. Embassy, Tehran—November 4, 1979



After the ouster of the Shah of Iran, the return of Ayatollah Khomeini to Iran, and the first attempted takeover of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran in February 1979, the United States drew down its staff significantly and revamped its security by July 1979 (Carter, 1982, p. 415). Whether the arrival of the Shah in the United States on October 22 was a catalyst for the hostage seizure or not (a point which is disputed in some literature, though the CIA strongly avers that the attack was not a retaliation), CIA reporting indicates that plotting for the embassy takeover began around October 25 (CIA, 1981, p. 6). On November 4, a large crowd began approaching the U.S. Embassy around 9:00 a.m. By 10:00 a.m., they had breached

the perimeter. By 10:30 a.m., it was reported that approximately 3,000 people were inside the embassy compound (International Court of Justice, 1980, p. 125). The mob gained access to the chancery around noon (CIA, 1981, p. 5). By 12:30 p.m., the attackers made it to the third floor, seizing everyone inside except the 11 Americans who were in the vault. It took the assailants one more hour to gain access to the vault, totaling 4.5 hours from 9:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., when the attack culminated. By 3:00 p.m. it was reported that all embassy personnel had been taken hostage. Fifty-two American hostages were held for 444 days until their eventual release on January 20, 1981.

U.S. Embassy, Islamabad— November 21, 1979



In the midst of the Iran hostage crisis, the Grand Mosque in Mecca was attacked on November 20. Later that day, Iranian Ayatollah Khomeini made a statement insinuating that the United States was behind the attack. The next day, a large crowd descended on the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad around 12:20 p.m. and began throwing rocks. By 1:00 p.m., there were 2,000 protesters. By 1:45 p.m., the crowd reportedly exceeded 20,000, forcing local police to flee as the protesters began scaling the wall. At 2:00 p.m., the assailants breached the first and second floors of the chancery, and all American nonsecurity embassy personnel were locked inside the vault while MSGs attempted to hold the crowds back with tear gas. By 3:00 p.m., the protesters were lighting fires throughout the compound, and MSGs and Diplomatic Security personnel also retreated to the vault. At 4:11 p.m., the fires spread, threatening the vault and forcing the embassy personnel to move first to the ambassador’s office and then to the rooftop, where they were eventually able to escape to the courtyard and out of harm’s way. The seizure attempt

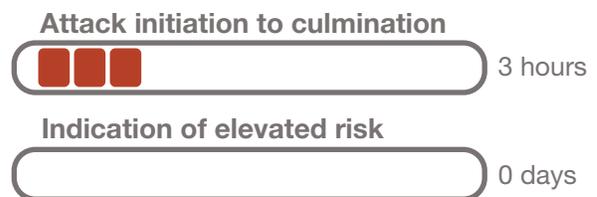
lasted approximately 4.5 hours before the attack culminated with the rooftop escape of all personnel; one U.S. marine was killed (Daugherty, 2009, pp. 240–242).

U.S. Embassy, Tripoli—December 2, 1979



In an attack that lasted approximately one hour and 15 minutes, a crowd of some 2,000 protesters began attacking the U.S. Embassy in Tripoli around 10:15 a.m. on December 2, 1979. The attack culminated at approximately 11:30 a.m. when all embassy personnel were able to escape through a side exit before the first floor of the chancery was set on fire and destroyed. The assailants were protesting the alleged U.S. role in the attack on the Grand Mosque in Mecca 12 days earlier (*New York Times*, 1979b).

Spanish Embassy, Guatemala City— January 31, 1980



The fatal January 31, 1980, attack on the Spanish Embassy in Guatemala City was set into motion following the displacement of indigenous Mayan communities by Guatemalan forces on January 9. Peasants from the affected communities reportedly traveled to Guatemala City on January 15, where they linked up with students from San Carlos University (Stoll, 1999, p. 60). On January 28, the group briefly took over two radio stations in order to get attention; when that failed, they proceeded to occupy the Spanish Embassy around 11:05 a.m. on January 31. At about 11:45 a.m., Guatemalan government forces

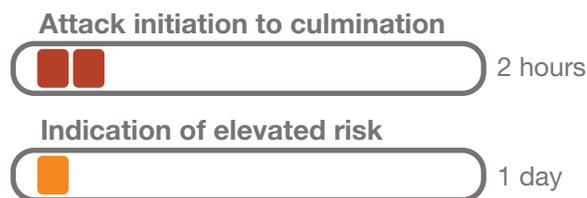
surrounded the embassy, and the Spanish ambassador asked them to stand down while he negotiated with the protesters. The Guatemalan forces, not heeding the ambassador's request, moved in. By 1:30 p.m., they took possession of the embassy's roof and balconies. Under disputed conditions (whether it was a Molotov cocktail gone awry or the Guatemalan forces' doing, or a combination of the two), a fire broke out at 2:15 p.m., killing everyone inside—a total of 36 people—except for the Spanish ambassador, who escaped through a window. The attack culminated in just over three hours (Organization of American States, 1981; DoS, 1980a, 1980b, 1980c).

Spanish Embassy, San Salvador—February 4, 1980



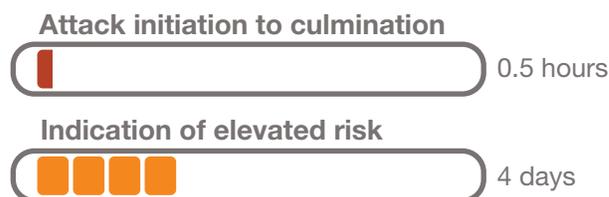
With the security situation in El Salvador unstable following the junta of October 15, 1979, many popular leftist movements joined under one umbrella in early 1980 with the stated mission of ousting “Yankee imperialism.” On January 22, the umbrella group held a mass demonstration in San Salvador. Less than two weeks later, on February 4, 30 members of the Popular League of February 28 (PL-28) seized the Spanish Embassy; the attack culminated in approximately one hour, when the assailants succeeded in taking 11 hostages. The final hostages were released on February 18 after the government of El Salvador released the last of five PL-28 prisoners, per the PL-28's demands (Jenkins, p. 37, 1981).

U.S. Embassy, Tegucigalpa—April 7, 1988



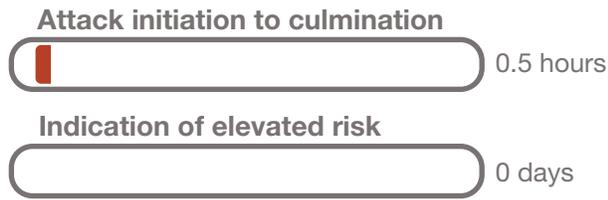
On April 5, 1988, the Honduran military—deeply embroiled in corruption accusations—arrested Juan Ramon Matta Ballesteros (aka Mr. Matta), a drug trafficker wanted by the United States, and handed him over to U.S. officials. Two days later, and one day after it was announced that Mr. Matta had arrived in the United States, protests broke out around 7:00 p.m. at the U.S. Embassy in Tegucigalpa. Within an hour, the protesters had breached the compound and set the embassy on fire. The attack culminated around 9:00 p.m., when riot police arrived on scene and dispersed the 800 to 1,000 protesters (Diplomatic Security, 1989, p. 6). The protest lasted over two hours, with five demonstrators killed in the fray (*New York Times*, 1988).

U.S. Embassy, Seoul—May 20, 1988



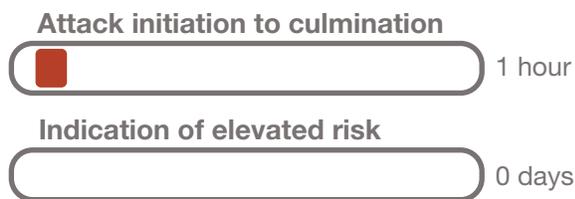
In the midst of an uptick of anti-U.S. sentiment, protests, and attacks in South Korea, a Korean student committed suicide by disemboweling himself and left a letter calling for the withdrawal of all U.S. forces from Korea on May 16, 1988. Student and anti-U.S. protests surged in Seoul on May 18 and 19. At 11:30 a.m. on May 20, a group of young Koreans rushed the U.S. Embassy and threw explosive devices. Five of the demonstrators managed to scale the fence and gain access to the embassy compound, where they attempted to burn an American flag and hang an anti-U.S. banner. The attack culminated when the students were apprehended by Korean police in under five minutes (Diplomatic Security, 1989, p. 22).

U.S. Embassy, Seoul—October 13, 1989



Following the appointment of U.S. Ambassador Donald Gregg to South Korea on September 14, 1989, a group of six radical students overran the ambassador's residence in Seoul at 6:30 a.m. on October 13. The students were armed with homemade explosives, tear gas grenades, and steel pipes. The students destroyed furniture and artwork and threw explosive devices to keep the security forces at bay, but the ambassador and his wife escaped unharmed. The attack culminated in approximately 30 minutes when riot police apprehended the students (Diplomatic Security, 1990, p. 24). The attack came on the eve of a visit by South Korean President Roh Tae Woe to the United States and amidst other related anti-U.S. protests (Associated Press, 1989).

U.S. Embassy, Seoul—October 18, 1990



On October 18, 1990, 11 students orchestrated an attack on the U.S. Embassy in Seoul. Two students threw a firebomb and attacked the riot police guarding the consular annex. The two then fled across the street, drawing many of the police with them. The other nine students then drove up in a van, scaled the embassy fence, and made it onto the roof of the consular annex abutting the chancery. The students detonated several improvised explosive devices, but the attack culminated when the students were quickly apprehended by police (Diplomatic Security, 1991, p. 23).

Japanese Ambassador's Residence, Lima—December 17, 1996



The lead-up to the December 1996 takeover of the Japanese ambassador's residence, during a diplomatic reception in honor of the Emperor of Japan's birthday, began one year earlier. On December 1, 1995, the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA) had attempted but failed to wage a similar attack on the Peruvian congress (DoS, 1996, p. 3). By October 12, 1996, the MRTA had reportedly turned its sights to the Japanese event (DoS, 1997, p. 4). By 7:00 p.m. on the day of the incident, MRTA members were working undercover as members of the waitstaff at the ambassador's residence. At 8:25 p.m., the MRTA opened its attack, blowing a hole in the residence's perimeter and battling the police. The police battled the assailants for about an hour before the attack culminated, when the police were forced outside (Sims, 1996). There were about 600 guests in attendance, including eight American officials. Some 170 guests were released immediately, and more were released over the course of days and months. The last 72 hostages remained in MRTA hands until April 22, 1997, when a Peruvian force stormed the residence. One hostage, two members of the rescue team, and all of the hostage takers were killed (Diplomatic Security, 1997, p. 12).

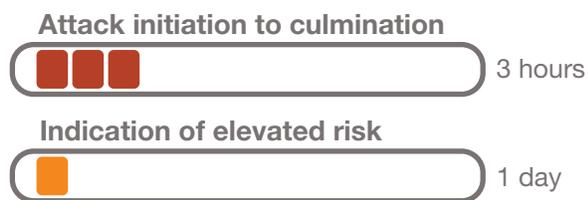
U.S. Embassy, Damascus—December 19, 1998



On December 16, 1998, President Bill Clinton announced a joint U.S.-UK airstrike campaign

against Iraq for its refusal to cooperate with UN weapon inspectors. Three days into the air campaign, at around 9:00 a.m. on December 19, protests over the airstrikes began in Damascus. Around 9:40 a.m., demonstrators began to infiltrate the U.S. Embassy compound. At 11 a.m., the embassy's Regional Security Officer gave the order for MSGs to use tear gas to force the intruders back. The protesters eventually dispersed from their positions after climbing onto the chancery roof; however, another group of protesters forced their way into the ambassador's residence at 12:57 p.m. MSGs were able to move the ambassador's wife—who was in the residence at the time—to safety. At 2:05 p.m., the protesters returned to the embassy compound and entered the chancery. The attack culminated by 3:00 p.m., when the protesters were once again pushed out of the embassy compound (Daugherty, 2008, pp. 303–304), though protests continued in Damascus for at least another hour (Williams, 1998).

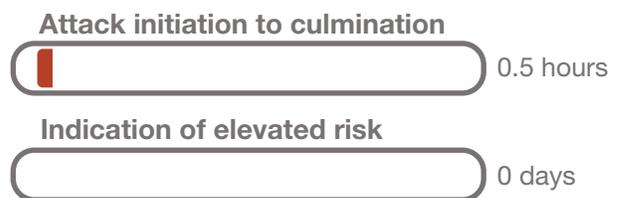
U.S. Embassy, Skopje—March 25, 1999



NATO began stationing troops in Macedonia in December 1998 as part of its effort to protect Kosovo during the Kosovo War. On March 24, 1999, NATO began what would be a two-and-a-half month bombing campaign against the government of Yugoslavia. On the morning of March 24, after the bombings had begun, small, peaceful, and expected protests against the bombings began outside the U.S. Embassy in Macedonia. Sometime in the late afternoon, however, the protests began to turn violent. By 5:15 p.m., the windows at the embassy started to give way after repeated attacks. At 5:45 p.m., all embassy personnel were locked in the safe haven, where they remained until the attack culminated sometime around 7:00 p.m., when Macedonian police intervened and removed the demonstrators. The attack lasted approximately three hours, resulting in

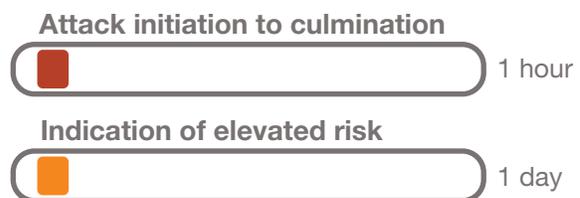
significant damage throughout the compound (Hill, 2015, pp. 158–165).

U.S. Consulate, Belém—March 26, 1999



More than 400 demonstrators protesting unemployment and land reform marched in front of the U.S. Consulate in Belém, Brazil, at 5:30 p.m. on March 26, 1999. Around 6:00 p.m., 20 to 30 protesters scaled the wall surrounding the consular agency, breaking windows and light fixtures and vandalizing the garden. The protesters were quickly dispersed; the attack culminated in around 30 minutes (Diplomatic Security, 2000, p. 9).

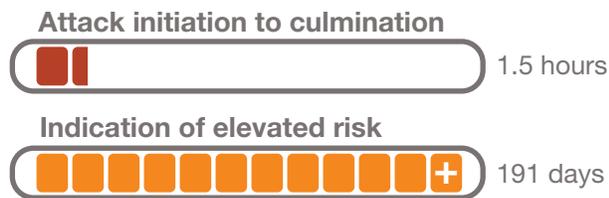
U.S. Embassy, Manama—April 5, 2002



On March 29, 2002, Israel began an offensive in Palestine, surrounding the compound of Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Chairman Yasser Arafat on March 30. On April 4, with tensions already inflamed across the Middle East, U.S. Ambassador to Bahrain Ronald Neumann was reported in the press to have asked for a moment of silence for the Israeli victims of the intifada (Neumann, 2010, p. 155). On April 5, protests against U.S. support for Israel broke out in Manama, with approximately 2,000 demonstrators gathering outside the U.S. Embassy around 3:00 p.m. (Palmer, 2002). The protesters threw stones, breached the embassy wall, and set multiple vehicles on fire (Diplomatic Security, 2003, p. 16). The attack culminated in approximately one hour, when Bahraini security

forces dispersed the crowds, killing one protester with a rubber bullet (Salman, 2002).

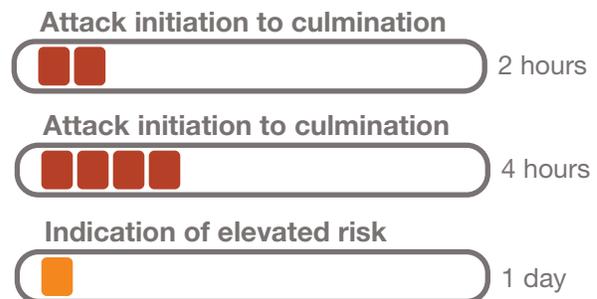
U.S. Consulate, Jeddah—December 6, 2004



The first indication of an increased threat in Saudi Arabia in 2004 came on May 29, when al Qaeda operatives attacked the residential compound of an oil company, killed 22 hostages, and threatened in a public statement that 2004 would be “bloody and miserable for infidels” (Prados, 2005, p. 6). Just over five months later, on November 2—and a month before the attack in Jeddah—the Saudi branch of al Qaeda appointed a new leader, indicating a possible resumption of operations (Stratfor, 2004). On November 9, an al Qaeda cell that was allegedly planning a major attack was taken out in Jeddah. On November 27, an al Qaeda operative was killed by Saudi police in Jeddah, and a cache of arms was found in his car (Cordesman, 2005, p. 8). The December 6 attack on the U.S. Consulate began at 11:15 a.m., when a car carrying five al Qaeda terrorists attempted to follow a consulate vehicle through the delta barriers onto the compound. The barriers shut in time to block the assailant’s vehicle, but the attackers got out and proceeded on foot, throwing pipe bombs and killing one guard with small arms fire. All American staff were immediately withdrawn behind the hardline in the chancery, with the exception of one staff member who had hidden in his or her vehicle. At 11:35 a.m., the attackers burned the MSG house and tried to breach the chancery with small arms fire, wounding one American. At 11:45 a.m., the terrorists took the non-American embassy personnel who were not in the chancery saferooms hostage. Almost an hour later, at 12:35 p.m., the attack culminated when Saudi forces stormed the building and began an assault on the hostage takers; four hostages were killed in the

crossfire. The Saudi forces killed three attackers and arrested two others (Knights, 2005).

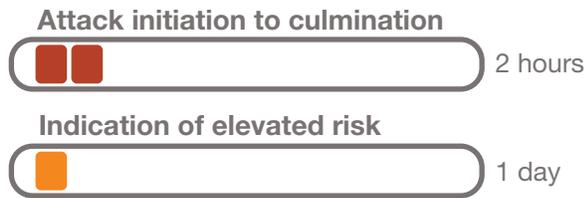
Danish and Norwegian Embassies, Damascus—February 4, 2006



In early 2006, anti-Western protests across the Middle East were fomented after a series of cartoons depicting the Prophet Mohammed, originally published in a Danish newspaper on September 30, 2005, were reprinted in a Norwegian newspaper on January 10, 2006, and then again by multiple outlets on February 1. The first round of protests against the cartoons occurred on January 27. On Thursday, February 2, the Syrian prime minister gave instructions for mosques, during Friday prayers the next day, to encourage violence over the cartoons. The request was carried out on February 3 by imams across Damascus (Reuters, 2010). On February 4, protests in Damascus began in the early afternoon as thousands gathered outside of the Danish Embassy. The protests quickly escalated as demonstrators broke through a police barricade and set the embassy on fire. The Danish Embassy attack culminated in approximately two hours, then protesters moved on to the Norwegian Embassy approximately 4 miles away and also set it aflame (*Spiegel Online*, 2006). In videos posted on YouTube, protesters can be seen ransacking the Norwegian Embassy well after the sun set at 5:07 p.m. that evening—thus, the latter attack culminated in four or more hours, when protestors were eventually dispersed. The indication of elevated risk for both the Danish and Norwegian Embassies is assessed as the same, as newspapers from both countries had run the cartoons and protests across the Middle East had been widespread

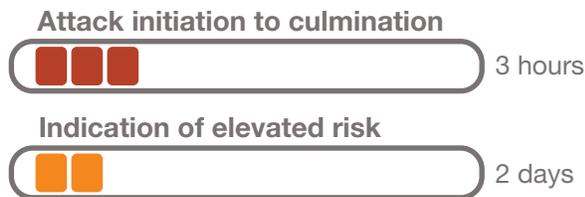
against European diplomatic facilities and cultural symbols.

Danish Embassy, Beirut—February 5, 2006



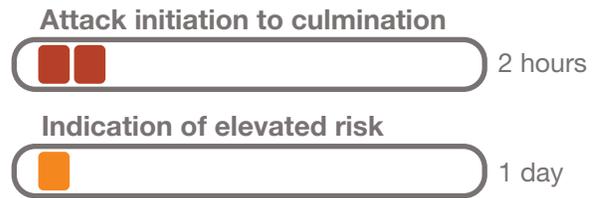
On the morning of February 5, a group of protesters—also incensed over the cartoons—attacked the Danish Embassy in Beirut, breaking windows and setting the embassy on fire. It took the Lebanese security forces approximately two hours to regain control of the area, when the attack culminated with the use of water cannons and live warning shots (Zoepf and Fattah, 2006).

Italian Consulate, Benghazi—February 17, 2006



The first protests in Libya over the Danish cartoons occurred in Tripoli on February 4, though no Western diplomatic facilities were seized at that time. On February 15, an Italian cabinet minister went on TV wearing a t-shirt with the cartoons printed on them. Two days later, on February 17, protests began in Benghazi as approximately 1,000 demonstrators converged on the Italian Consulate. Despite local security forces using tear gas and firing live bullets—killing at least ten protesters—the group broke into the building and set it on fire. According to reports, the attack culminated in “a few hours” (BBC, 2006).

U.S. Embassy, Belgrade—February 21, 2008



After Kosovo declared independence on February 17, 2008, articles ran across Serbia on February 20 calling for a protest to begin in Belgrade at 5:00 p.m. the following day (Tzortzi, 2008). Because of the planned demonstrations, the U.S. Embassy closed early on February 21, leaving only security personnel at the facility. Protests began outside the U.S. Embassy by 6:50 p.m. As the demonstrations grew, violent protesters breached the compound perimeter and the unsecured areas of the chancery, setting it on fire. At the time, there was inadequate local security presence to protect the embassy, and those present reportedly did little to stop the violent infiltration during the initial hours of the attack. The attack culminated approximately two hours after the embassy compound perimeter had been breached, when local riot police intervened and resecured the compound. (McCormack, 2008).

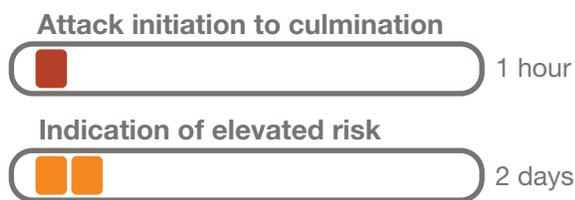
U.S. Embassy, Sana'a—September 17, 2008



The threat of al Qaeda in Yemen had been on the rise throughout 2008—as indicated first by a mortar attack on a girls’ school on March 18, which had prompted the U.S. Embassy to go on an Ordered Departure to reduce non-essential staff (Sharp, 2008, p. 6). On April 30, experts warned that al Qaeda in Yemen was likely to get stronger before it got weaker (Johnsen, 2008, p. 3). On August 11, after an al Qaeda cell was rolled up in Yemen, the group

publicly promised retaliation (Worth, 2008). In what should have been a final warning, according to experts, al Qaeda in Yemen posted a teaser online on September 9, indicating that a new issue of their journal was imminent—which echoed previous indicators of impending attacks (Johnsen, 2010, p. 10). The September 17 attack on the U.S. Embassy began at 9:15 a.m., when two vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices approached the embassy gate and detonated, after which armed gunmen wearing suicide vests disembarked and infiltrated the compound. The attack culminated in approximately 20 minutes, killing 18 people, including one American (Diplomatic Security, 2009, p. 31).

U.S. Embassy, Damascus—July 11, 2011



Four months after a popular uprising began in Syria, the U.S. and French ambassadors visited the opposition stronghold of Hama on July 7, 2011. On July 9, after the ambassadors returned to Damascus, the first round of protests against the visit began outside the U.S. Embassy, prompting concerns that the Syrian government was not doing enough to protect the embassy compound (Bakri, 2011). U.S. Ambassador Robert Stephen Ford raised this concern in a meeting with the Syrian foreign minister on July 10 (Nuland, 2011). Following the meeting, Ambassador Ford posted a statement condemning Syria for its crackdown on pro-democracy protesters. That evening, a pro-government television network urged Syrians to express their anger against the U.S. and French visit to Hama. The following day, protesters arrived in buses at the U.S. Embassy. The protest, which the Syrian security forces did little to stop, resulted in about ten demonstrators infiltrating the compound after destroying the main entrance and climbing onto the roof. The attack culminated about an hour after it had begun, when MSGs were able to

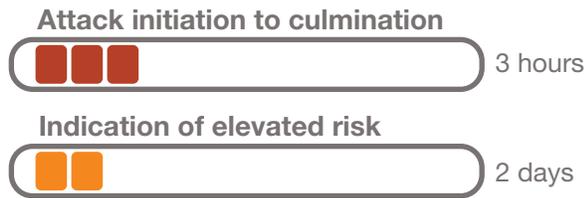
push the protesters back out of the compound without any American injuries (Sly and Warrick, 2011). The French Embassy was also attacked by protestors throwing rocks and eggs; however, demonstrators were driven off after security guards fired live ammunition, and the French Embassy compound was not breached.

Israeli Embassy, Cairo—September 9, 2011



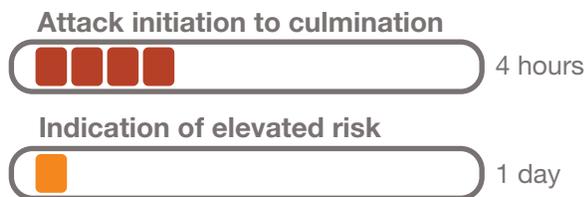
Amid the unrest in Egypt in 2011, anti-Israeli sentiment was stoked when five Egyptian police officers were killed by Israeli forces near the Israeli-Egyptian border on August 18. On August 20, protesters gathered outside the Israeli Embassy in Cairo, with one demonstrator climbing to the roof of the building. Nearly three weeks later, on September 8, the Egyptian government permitted larger protests to go ahead the next day (Fahmy, 2011). In the midst of those protests on September 9, a sizable group of demonstrators converged on the Israeli Embassy around 5:00 p.m. For hours, the demonstrators hurled bottles and worked to penetrate the wall surrounding the compound, with Egyptian police firing tear gas that was ultimately unsuccessful in holding back the crowds. By 10:00 p.m., the wall was fully breached, and the Israelis at the embassy were trapped behind a reinforced door (Miller, 2011). After hours of local and international efforts to extract the Israeli officials (DoS, 2011), the last six Israeli security guards were finally extracted around 5:00 a.m. the following morning, when the attack culminated (Birnbaum, 2011).

UK Embassy, Tehran—November 29, 2011



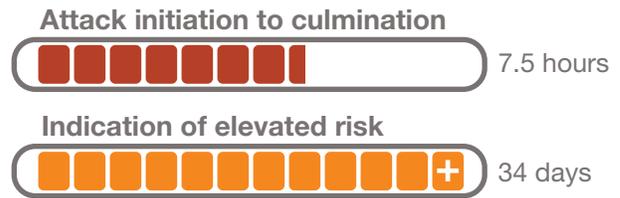
Following the November 21, 2011, announcement of new UK sanctions on Iran, the Iranian government voted on November 27 to downgrade its diplomatic relationship with the UK. Two days later, hundreds of protesters forced their way into the UK Embassy around 7:10 p.m. The protesters resisted security forces, vandalized the embassy, and reportedly took six hostages, which they released at 8:42 p.m. At 10:10 p.m., the attack culminated when it was reported that all protesters had been dispersed from the embassy (*The Guardian*, 2011).

U.S. Embassy, Cairo—September 11, 2012



As concerns began to grow about a possible backlash against the American-made anti-Islamic film *Innocence of Muslims*, social media posts on September 10, 2012, began to call for protests in front of the U.S. Embassy in Cairo the following day, with multiple U.S. agencies aware of the impending demonstrations (U.S. House of Representatives, 2016, pp. 19–22). On September 11, around 2,000 protesters began gathering in front of the U.S. Embassy at 4:15 p.m. By 4:42 p.m., protesters had scaled the embassy wall and were attempting to set the outside of the building on fire. The attack culminated at 8:00 p.m. when Egyptian security forces were able to remove all of the protesters and secure the area (*Washington Post*, 2012).

U.S. Consulate, Benghazi—September 11, 2012



On August 8, DoS warned of worsening security conditions at the U.S. Mission in Benghazi, Libya, following four months of attacks against Western interests in the city, including the U.S. Mission, and associated warnings. (U.S. House of Representatives, 2016, pp. 320, 331, 555). On September 8, local militias said they could not guarantee the security of the Benghazi U.S. Mission compound, and members of the February 17 Martyr Brigade told DoS Diplomatic Security officers that they would no longer be able to support off-compound moves (U.S. House of Representatives, 2016, p. 473). On the evening of September 10, after arriving in Benghazi, Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens was briefed on the increased security threats. The next morning, a security guard reported having observed surveillance of the compound, and this incident was briefed to Ambassador Stevens (U.S. House of Representatives, 2016, p. 436). The attack began at 9:42 p.m. By 10:00 p.m., a fire had been started, creating heavy smoke. By 10:02 p.m., Ambassador Stevens had been separated from the main group of American personnel fleeing the attack. Local forces arrived at 10:38 p.m. By 11:23 p.m., all surviving DoS personnel at the embassy had been evacuated to the CIA Annex (U.S. House of Representatives, 2016, p. 559). At 12:34 a.m., the CIA Annex came under attack from small arms fire, rocket-propelled grenades, and improvised explosive devices. The attack subsided briefly, resumed around 1:10 a.m., and again halted. At 5:15 a.m., the annex was once again attacked with mortars ten minutes after the U.S. team from U.S. Embassy Tripoli had finally arrived to assist. Nonetheless, the arrival of this U.S. team was the culmination point, as the reinforcements from U.S. Embassy Tripoli were assessed to have regained full control of the facility and of surviving embassy personnel. By 6:34 a.m., the annex evacuation was

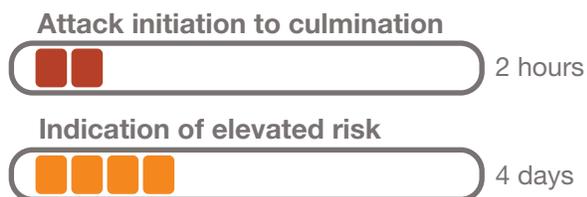
complete, and all surviving Americans were on their way to the airport (U.S. House of Representatives, 2016, p. 76). Four Americans, including Ambassador Stevens, had been killed.

U.S. Embassy, Sana'a—September 13, 2012



Following the September 10 social media posts in Cairo and the September 11 attacks in Cairo and Benghazi, approximately 500 protesters gathered outside the U.S. Embassy in Sana'a at 10:30 a.m. on September 13. The demonstrators overwhelmed the security forces and infiltrated the compound, where they vandalized the grounds and set several fires. The first group of protesters fled when host-country security reinforcements arrived, though groups of protesters continued to harass the embassy throughout the day until the attack culminated around 7:00 p.m., when the last demonstrators were dispersed (Diplomatic Security, 2013, p. 10).

U.S. Embassy, Tunis—September 14, 2012



The first protests in Tunisia related to the *Innocence of Muslims* film took place outside the U.S. Embassy in Tunis on September 12, but local police dispersed the crowds with tear gas when they attempted to approach the embassy (DoS, 2012d). On September 13, there were more social media posts calling for more protests the following day (DoS, 2012e). On September 14, as hundreds of protesters gathered, the embassy came under attack at 4:20 p.m.,

when the embassy wall was breached. At 4:40 p.m., the protesters reportedly outnumbered police and were setting fires, but all of the American staff were sheltering in the safe haven. The attack culminated in approximately two hours, with protesters reportedly still being cleared around 6:26 p.m. (DoS, 2012f).

German and U.S. Embassies, Khartoum—September 14, 2012



The Khartoum attacks related to the *Innocence of Muslims* film began at 12:10 p.m., when a protester threw a Molotov cocktail at the German Embassy. The protesters continued to assault the German compound until the attack culminated with the arrival of SWAT and riot police at 1:30 p.m. (DoS, 2012a). The protesters then moved to the U.S. Embassy, where they began gathering by 3:05 p.m. They were reported to be throwing Molotov cocktails at 5:10 p.m., and by 5:20 p.m. they were approaching the embassy wall. They breached the wall at 5:30 p.m., but by 5:45 p.m. local police were said to be regaining control (DoS, 2012b). The attack culminated when protesters were dispersed around 7:00 p.m. after setting the consular section on fire (DoS, 2012b). The indication of elevated risk is assessed as the same for both the German and U.S. Embassies, as growing concern over reaction to the film was shared by many Western targets, not just U.S. facilities (and by German targets in particular, since a German group had announced plans to screen the film).

Attack Timeline Trends

Using the data from the above attack histories, Figure 2 shows that a majority (20 of the 33 partially or fully successful attacks) culminated in two hours or less, and over 90 percent (30 of the 33) culminated in six hours or less.

For all 33 attacks from 1979 to the present, the median attack initiation to culmination was two hours, and the average was 2.7 hours. In the past decade, however, the median attack initiation to culmination was four hours, and the average was 4.8 hours. Basic regression models, as well as a Kruskal-Wallis test, showed with marginal statistical significance that the attack durations have indeed been increasing since 1979. The reasons for this increase are as of yet unverified, although they are likely related to the fact that U.S. facilities have

become increasingly hardened over time. Any lengthening in the durations of attacks could offer response forces wider windows of opportunity to intervene.

Regarding the indication of elevated risk, we found no consistent change in this measure over time. We found the median indication of elevated risk to be 2.5 days. We also found very few cases in which there was advance warning of more than 30 days—only five times out of all the cases studied, or exactly once per decade. As shown in Figure 3, the advance warning extended beyond three months in only two cases. On the other hand, there were two or more days of warning for 19, or nearly 60 percent, of the 32 cases of successful attacks. There was one day of warning for nine, or 28 percent, of the attacks. There was little or no warning for only four, or 12.5 percent, of the attacks.

FIGURE 2
Majority of Attacks Culminated in Two Hours or Less

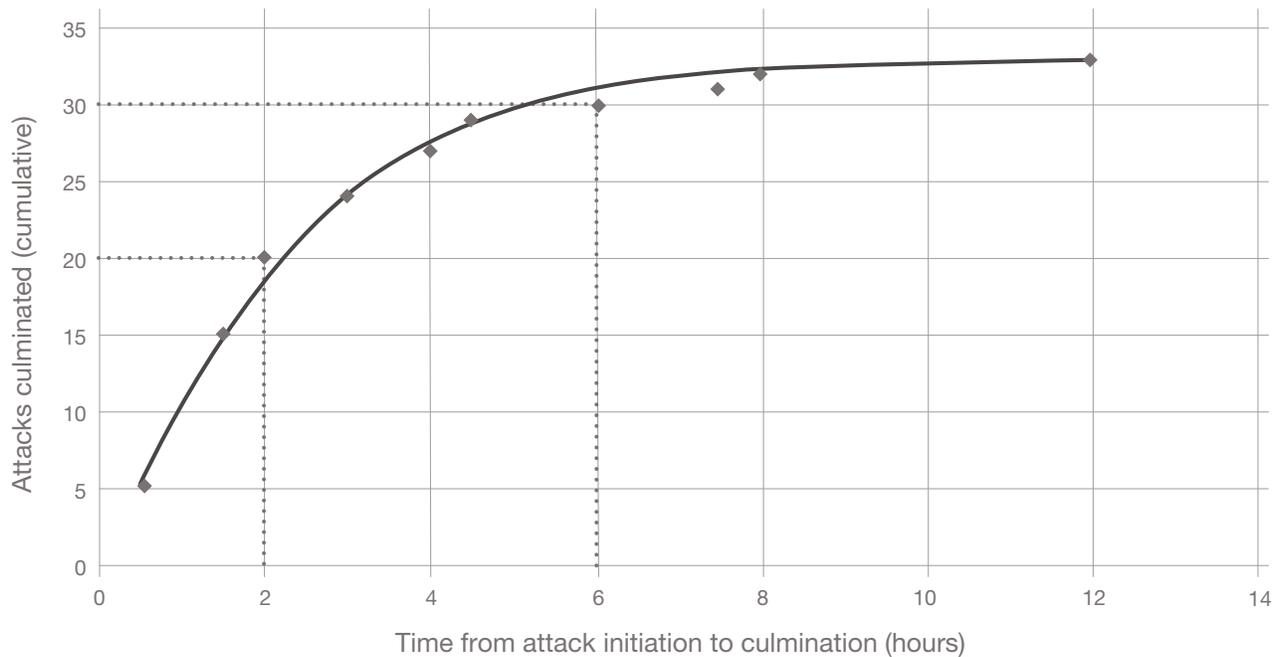
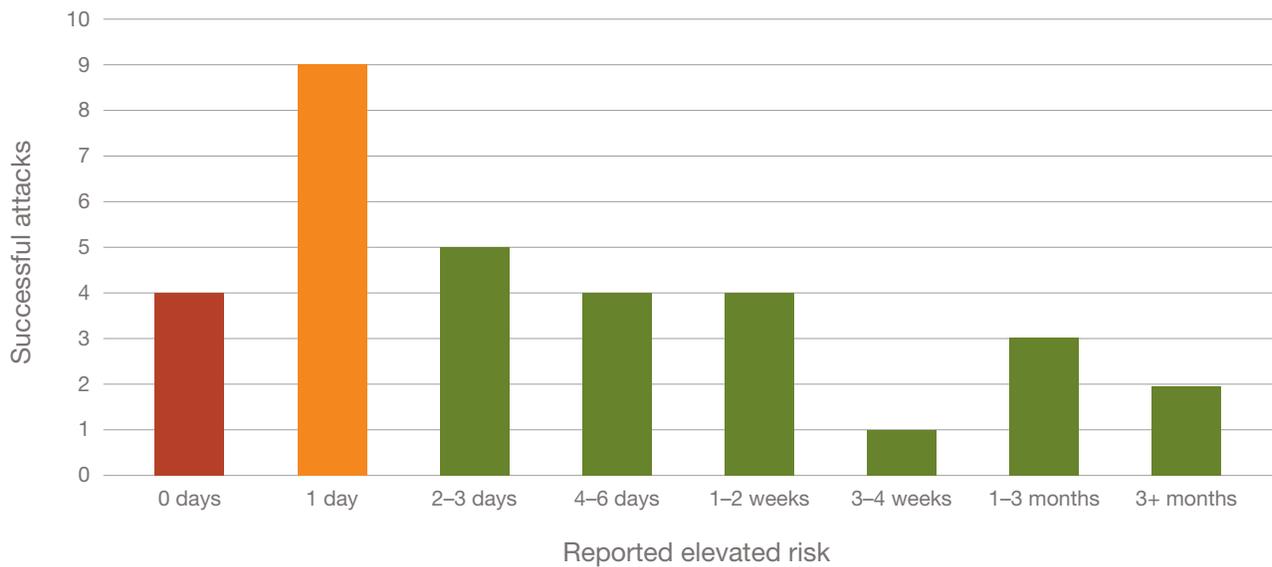


FIGURE 3

For Majority of Attacks, There Were Two or More Days of Warning



A Three-Tiered Planning Approach

The U.S. Department of Defense has moved in the direction of a precautionary yet proactive approach to crisis response, seeking to position response forces in proximity to likely areas of need before the crises arise. Our analysis supports this proactive approach. Given the extraordinarily short warning and event timelines in many cases, adopting a more proactive approach appears to be the only viable means of achieving the national strategic objective of protecting diplomatic facilities in these cases. However, our analysis also indicates that the proactive approach should align with three crisis response tiers: Early Security Augmentation, Anticipatory Security Augmentation, and In Extremis Response.

Early Security Augmentation pertains to long-term DoS crisis-mitigation planning. Defense Department efforts are focused primarily on the latter two tiers of crisis planning: Anticipatory Security Augmentation and In Extremis Response.³ The data suggest a planning time horizon for Anticipatory Security Augmentation of no more than 24 hours,

representing a response based on discrete warnings of an imminent attack on one or more facilities. Likewise, the data suggest a planning time horizon for In Extremis Response of no more than one to two hours, representing an emergency response to the majority of incidents in progress well before culmination, by which time significant damage to U.S. facilities or harm to U.S. persons will have already occurred.

Anticipatory Security Augmentation would allow the response force to position itself to respond to the majority of attacks in advance of these attacks. The force should place itself in as close proximity as possible to an imminent attack to minimize the response time, coordinate hardening and protective measures, and provide other security assistance to the diplomatic facility.

In Extremis Response would likely require additional capabilities and posture, as well as existing capabilities that are not formally incorporated into current crisis response planning. Future research and analysis would be required to identify the requirements, costs, and effectiveness of such an approach.

³ Crisis planners often refer to Anticipatory Security Augmentation as Late Security Augmentation, which has response times measured in hours, not days or weeks.

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