

Possible terror threat closes U.S. embassies on Sunday

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USPA News - An unspecified number of U.S. embassies and consulates around the globe, but the vast majority of them believed to be in the Middle East, will be closed Sunday due to security concerns, U.S. officials confirmed on Thursday amid reports that a terrorist attack may be imminent. U.S. State Department spokeswoman Marie Harf said the department instructed "certain" U.S. embassies and consulates to remain closed or to suspend operations on Sunday.

"The Department has been apprised of information that, out of an abundance of caution and care for our employees and others who may be visiting our installations, that indicates we should institute these precautionary steps," she said. Harf could not say which and how many embassies and consulates would be closed, but Sunday is a business day in mostly the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia. At least thirteen embassies and consulates, almost all of them in the Middle East, had announced their Sunday closure by early Friday morning. U.S. officials refused to provide specific details about the nature of the security concerns, but unnamed sources told CBS News that U.S. intelligence agencies have picked up signs that al-Qaeda is plotting an attack against U.S. diplomatic posts in the Middle East and other Muslim countries. CBS News correspondent David Martin said the intelligence does not mention a specific location, which is why a large number of embassies and consulates are being closed. He said, citing unnamed officials, that the intelligence suggests it is "a real plot in the making" and not just chatter among terrorists. Harf said the security concerns revolve around August 4 specifically, but she indicated that embassies could remain closed for a longer period of time. "It is possible we may have additional days of closure as well," she said. "Depending on our analysis, individual U.S. embassies and consulates will announce whether or not they are open and whether they are implementing restrictions or other measures." But while U.S. officials were reluctant to discuss specific details, Harf cautioned people from making assumptions before more details have been released. "I would caution people, as I think we always do, from making any assumptions or drawing conclusions before there are more facts available," she said. U.S. diplomatic posts which announced they would be closed on Sunday include the U.S. embassies in the Jordanian capital of Amman, the Egyptian capital of Cairo, Kuwait, the Libyan capital of Tripoli, the Israeli city of Tel Aviv, the Iraqi capital of Baghdad, the Qatari capital of Doha, the Emirati capital of Abu Dhabi, the Yemeni capital of Sana'a, and the Bangladeshi capital of Dhaka. Also closed will be the U.S. Consulate-General in the Iraqi city of Barah, the U.S. Consulate-General in the Iraqi city of Erbil, and the U.S. Consulate-General in the Emirati city of Dubai. The embassy's American Center in Dhaka, which houses the Foreign Agriculture Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Archer K. Blood Library, will also be closed. "The Department, when conditions warrant, takes steps like this to balance our continued operations with security and safety," the U.S. State Department said in an emergency message. "However, beyond this announcement we do not discuss specific threat information, security considerations or measures, or other steps we may be taking." The Obama administration has endured a storm of criticism over the past year for its handling of the September 11 attack on the U.S. consulate in the Libyan port city of Benghazi. The attack resulted in the deaths of four Americans, including U.S. Ambassador John Christopher Stevens.

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