

US Indicts 14 in Khobar Towers Case

A US federal grand jury on June 21 indicted 13 Saudis and one Lebanese national in the 1996 terrorist bombing of the Khobar Towers complex in Saudi Arabia--a terrorist act which killed 19 US airmen and wounded hundreds more US military personnel.

The indictment alleged extensive involvement by unnamed officials in Iran, though it sidestepped the question of Iranian government involvement and named no Iranian defendants.

The indictments were handed up five years almost to the day after the June 25, 1996, bombing. The statute of limitations was about to expire.

US authorities appeared to be trying to strike a balance between holding to account those who were responsible for murder while not unduly damaging US-Iran relations, which have warmed a bit since the election of President Mohammad Khatami.

None of those charged are currently in US custody. Some are in Saudi detainment--the FBI did not say how many--and some are currently at large. Then-FBI Director Louis J. Freeh expressed confidence that at least a few of the suspects would soon be brought for trial before US courts, though he did not say how that would happen. Washington and Riyadh have no extradition treaty.

Moreover, Saudi officials were angry at Washington for filing charges without notifying Riyadh (see "Saudis React With Displeasure at Khobar Towers Charges," p. 18).