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International Security

Arrests show that homegrown 'jihadists' pose significant threat

At the end of June, members of a federal anti-terrorism task force used a blow torch to break into a windowless warehouse in the Liberty City area of Miami, Fla., and arrested seven men, six of them American, suspected of being radical Muslims bent on waging a war against the United States of America.

FBI officials said the men were part of a homegrown terror cell and had contacted someone they believed to be an al Qaeda operative, seeking cash and equipment to build an army. One alleged target: the Sears Tower in Chicago, Ill.

One of the men provided the supposed al Qaeda operative with video and photographs of government buildings in Miami, including the FBI building.

Coming nearly a year after a group of terrorists bombed trains in London and just weeks after 17 men were charged with plotting to bomb targets in Canada and storm the Canadian Parliament, the Miami arrests make clear the danger posed by these homegrown terrorist groups.

UK bombers acted alone

On July 7, 2005, four young men detonated bombs on three London subway trains and a bus, killing 56 people, including themselves. It was the first suicide attack on British soil in modern times and the worst peacetime attacks to occur in Britain.

A British government report released in May 2006 found that the four men, while claiming inspiration from al Qaeda, acted alone and did not have any help from outside terrorist organizations. According to Britain's Home Office, the four men lived relatively anonymously, and the attack was carried out on a budget of less than \$15,000.

Three of the men were second generation British citizens of Pakistani origin, the fourth man was born in Jamaica and moved to Britain as a child. He converted to Islam in 2000. The report said authorities are not certain when the men hatched their deadly plot, but noted that two of the men visited Pakistan from November 2004 to February 2005 and one of them may have gone to an al Qaeda training camp for at least part of that time.

Despite claims of allegiance to al Qaeda, the bombs were constructed of materials readily available commercially and the plot was self-financed. "No great expertise is required to assemble a device of this kind," the report said. "It is possible that the know-how necessary could be obtained from open sources, but more likely that the group had advice from someone with previous experience given the careful handling required to ensure safety during the bomb making process and to get the manufacturing process right."

"This case demonstrates the real difficulty for law enforcement agencies and local communities in identifying potential terrorists," the report stated. "There is little in their backgrounds which mark them out as particularly vulnerable to radicalism."

The report did note that "the speed of radicalization of some of those involved in the attacks was . . . unexpected," but the attacks "showed that extremists could be created at any time through a very quick process."

A Canadian connection

Just a month after the British report stated that four men involved in the London bombings acted alone, the arrests of 17 Ontario, Canada residents on charges of plotting to bomb Canadian targets offered up an indicator of the broad effect of the bombings.

Law enforcement officials said that some members of the loosely-organized Canadian group had been in contact with members of the London group, and also with two Georgia men arrested in March. The Georgia arrests grew out of the Canadian investigation. The two men arrested had traveled to Canada and met with members of the Canadian group.

The Canadian suspects, 12 men and five youths, allegedly called attention to themselves by acquiring the components required to manufacture explosive devices. That included three tons of ammonium nitrate, 1,000 pounds more than the amount used in the 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. That attack killed 168 people.

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Authorities said the men had plans to storm the Canadian parliament, take hostages and behead them, as well as bomb buildings in Ontario.

According to news reports Canadian authorities said the group, while not linked directly to al Qaeda, had “become adherents of a violent ideology inspired by al Qaeda.” What sent them in that direction is unknown, although Canada has been designated as a target by al Qaeda leaders several times because of its continued support of the NATO military effort in Afghanistan. News of the arrests in Canada was quickly followed by news of another alleged plot, this one in the United States.

‘Kill all the devils we can’

According to the indictment of the seven men arrested in late June 2006 in Miami, their leader, Narseal Batiste, recruited individuals to wage war against the U.S. government, including a plot to destroy the 110-floor Sears Tower in Chicago. Batiste is accused of meeting in a hotel room with an informant that Batiste believed was a representative of al Qaeda. Batiste allegedly outlined his mission against the United States to the “al Qaeda representative,” and requested material supplies such as uniforms, money, machine guns, radios and vehicles. Neighbors said the men appeared to be training for something, following a strict exercise regimen.

The Miami group was planning to attack the FBI Office in Miami, a federal building in Miami-Dade County, a la McVeigh, and the Sears Tower in Chicago. The group’s arrest marks a victory in the war on terrorism but it also is a grim reminder of the persistent threat environment that exists and underscores the need for continued vigilance and preparedness.

The group’s meetings with the informant lasted from December 2005 through May 2006. The other six men also attended meetings with the informant and each swore oaths of loyalty to al

Qaeda. The men took reconnaissance photos of government buildings in the Miami area. “What we have is a situation where individuals here in America made plans to hurt Americans,” Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales said. While the group has been characterized as “more aspirational than operational” because they were in the early planning stages, Gonzales said “we took action when we did because we believe we have an obligation to protect America from another attack here. Today, terrorist threats may come from smaller, more loosely defined cells who are not affiliated with al Qaeda but who are inspired by a violent jihadist message.”

Terrorism in Asia

All of the recent terrorist attacks in Bali and Jakarta, Indonesia, and disrupted attacks in Singapore were performed or planned by small cells of Islamic extremists who were inspired by al Qaeda, but not directed or controlled by any al Qaeda global organization. In July 2006, the CIA dissolved its al Qaeda unit for this very reason.

As in the UK and Canada cases referred to above, most of the perpetrators in the Asia cases had never come to the attention of security authorities before the attacks. All this makes it difficult for security forces to identify, penetrate and neutralize these cells before they act. So in all Asian countries, the governments and responsible Muslim leaders are pleading with their citizens to come forward with any information on suspicious behavior. There is much debate over whether Muslims have an obligation to get actively engaged in condemning terrorist activity carried out in the name of Islam, and this is complicated by a sense on the part of many Muslims that they have been victimized for a long time in various ways. There is also a perverse satisfaction in some Muslims to see Muslims, even if terrorists, as a power to be reckoned with.

The motivations for terrorist attacks and political revolts by Muslims in Asia are varied, and are political, not religious. The political objectives

are primarily local, but the cells and insurgencies are training grounds for terrorists who can, and have, served al Qaeda interests in Afghanistan and Iraq. They pose a potential threat to U.S. interests abroad and at home. Islamic extremism is a worldwide movement, and its individual adherents are willing to travel anywhere to commit terrorist attacks for any number of reasons. The amorphousness and individualism of the movement makes it dangerous in the extreme.

A different kind of terrorist

From anarchist bombings during the early 1900s to assassinations to the attempted bombing of the U.S. Capitol Building by the Weather Underground in 1971, terror attacks on U.S. soil by U.S. citizens have occurred in relatively recent times.

The threat was brought home in horrific fashion on April 19, 1995 when a truck bomb planted by Timothy McVeigh brought down the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. Initially it was thought to be a plot hatched by Middle Eastern extremists. Then McVeigh, a disillusioned veteran of the first Gulf War, was arrested. McVeigh had no allegiance to any foreign-based organization; he was a sympathizer of the anti-government militia movement based in the U.S.

A lesser-known case of a homegrown terror group began in January 2002 when a package was mistakenly delivered to a home on Staten Island, N.Y. The package contained false identification documents, including a Defense Intelligence Agency identification card and a United Nations Multinational Force Identification card. The package, intended for a man in New Jersey, was traced to a couple in Tyler, Texas. Authorities there began investigating and discovered the man not only had false documents, but also dangerous chemical weapons. A large quantity of sodium cyanide, and the acids that, if mixed with the sodium cyanide, would create deadly cyanide gas, were found along with dozens of explosives and illegal weapons.

The three were arrested and found to have connec-

tions to white supremacist and militia groups. They were convicted and sentenced to prison. The FBI notes that while identity theft and the use of false documentation is nothing new, the threat is greater now because of the ability of terrorists to utilize identity theft including Social Security numbers and fraud to obtain employment under false names and possibly access sensitive locations.

The FBI has long been concerned about the inconsistency of rules governing the issuance of state driver's licenses. If obtained, a fraudulent driver's license can be used by a terrorist as a jumping off point for obtaining other documents.

The recent rash of thefts of computer equipment on which individual personal data, including Social Security numbers, had been unwisely stored, illustrates the danger and the need for greater safeguarding of individual identity data. Under a false identity, a terrorist can rent mail drops, post office boxes, apartments, office spaces, vehicles and storage lockers. They can activate pagers, cellular telephones and utility services. In view of the above, a professional terrorist cell could exist for a substantial period of time operating discreetly.

The Real ID Act, slated to go into effect in 2008, established federally-mandated minimum standards that states must employ to issue driver's licenses and identity documents. The Department of Homeland Security will be responsible for implementing the Act.

The threat of sleeper cells

The recent revelations that a plan to attack the New York subway system was called off *45 days prior* to execution is another tragic reminder that we live in dangerous times.

Time magazine published excerpts of a recently released book by Ron Suskind, a former reporter for *The Wall Street Journal*, in which he detailed how the U.S. learned that al Qaeda operatives had traveled to New York via North Africa in the

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fall of 2002 to case locations for a cyanide gas attack on the New York subway system using remotely-activated gas canisters. Operatives told intelligence officials the attack was abruptly called off just over a month before it was to be executed. The order came from Osama bin Laden's number two, Ayman al-Zawahiri, no reason given.

Recently, information has surfaced that international intelligence cooperation disrupted a plan to bomb the Holland Tunnel and flood the New York Financial District. The terrorists' goal was to blow up the train tunnels located beneath the Holland Tunnel in New York, killing all in the tunnels, and as the terrorists incorrectly surmised, causing a flood of the New York Financial District that would rival the destruction of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans. This conspiracy and the bombings last week in India by Islamic fanatics that killed almost two hundred people prove these terrorist elements are still incessantly and relentlessly planning attacks. The transportation systems remain a target because these systems are vulnerable and carnage can be maximized. That such an attack was being planned illustrates that al Qaeda, while its network may be disrupted, still exerts influence among Islamic extremists. The possibility that sleeper cells exist in the U.S. and elsewhere cannot be discounted.

The Time for Urgency is Now®

If the recent arrests of a home grown Islamic terrorism cell in Toronto, Canada were not enough to shatter the myth "that it couldn't happen here" the arrests in Miami confirm our worst suspicions and fears. Although this "gang that couldn't shoot straight" was nipped in the bud, the ramifications are frightening. Although the Miami group appears to be amateurish and unprofessional, it was the aggressive activities and adequate resources of federal and local law enforcement that neutralized this plot. Timothy McVeigh may also have been an amateur, but in 1995 a terrorist attack on a federal building in

Oklahoma was not on anybody's list of concerns. The gruesome results attest to the continued necessity for urgency and preparedness.

This responsibility falls not only on federal, state and local government, but also on the business sector. Approximately 85 percent of the critical infrastructure in the United States of America is under the protection of private industry. It is imperative that those responsible for protecting the nation's power grid, its water supply and its landmark buildings are prepared to act when confronted with a threat, not just react. In the past, when thinking of terrorism and the horror it entails, one would look to the Middle East for the source of that threat. In today's climate, the threat can be anywhere.

Many in the security field questioned the ability of al Qaeda to recruit or attract followers among the Muslim communities in the United States. After events in Madrid, London, Toronto and now Miami, there is a scramble to reassess that position and plan accordingly. The Miami and Toronto terror cells are examples of grassroots jihadists working under local leaders to attack a country with which they have a long association, as opposed to operatives deployed by the central al Qaeda command from overseas to conduct a strike in a foreign country.

The 9/11 attacks were carried out by a group of professional terrorists that clandestinely infiltrated the United States. Since then, the United States has tightened up its security immeasurably, however the terrorists' success has inspired and emboldened homegrown fanatics to continue the struggle, as witnessed in Djakarta in 2003 and 2004, Bali in 2002 and 2005, Madrid in 2004, London in 2005, Amman in 2006 and now the neutralized efforts in Toronto and Miami. America and its allies and the international business community must make vigilance the rule, rather than the response to a specific threat.



The Lipman Report Editors