

PENNSYLVANIA ACTIONABLE INTELLIGENCE BULLETIN #26

TARGETED ACTIONABLE MONITORING CENTER

28 DECEMBER 2009

ACTIONABLE DATE REMINDERS

- **27 December-2 January:** First anniversary of Operation Cast Lead, an Israeli three-week counterterror operation in Gaza. (Reported in 21 December 2009 PAIB)
- **27-28 December:** Islamic world marks Day of Ashura; key commemoration in Shi'a Islam
- **31 December-1 January 2010:** New Year's Eve; New Year's Day. Parades, football bowl games in the US, and concerts in many cities worldwide.
- **4-25 January 2010:** Aggressive environmentalists will be attending what they are calling a Winter Action Camp in Rock Creek, West Virginia to learn the skills of "direct action". (Reported in 14 Dec 2009 PAIB)
- **11 January 2010:** Anti-war protesters will converge on the US embassy in London, UK. Similar protests in Washington DC; possibly elsewhere as well.
- **1-18 February 2010:** Animal rights activists worldwide will be noting "Remembrance for Animal Activists." At this time, there are no programs planned. Instead, organizers are seeking decentralized protests.

SECTOR-SPECIFIC THREATS

Sector: TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS

The Christmas Day Attack: Before and After

On 25 December 2009, an attempt was made to bring down a Detroit-bound commercial airliner (Northwest Airlines Flight 253 from Amsterdam) using explosives concealed on the terrorist's person by a suicide bomber apparently inspired by Al-Qaeda and other jihadist groups. In nearly all its elements, the attack followed a "game plan" discussed in great detail in jihadist communications previous to the attempted bombing.

* In a briefing provided to a major international air carrier several weeks prior to the Christmas Day terror incident, ITRR discussed new Al-Qaeda targeting communications dealing with the introduction of explosives and chemicals onto commercial aircraft.

* As stated in October and November 2009 alerts: "ITRR analysts have seen a recent increase in adversary communications and tactics that involve the targeting of mass transit and aviation." At the time, ITRR researchers noted that Al-Qaeda communications and training material dealing with the smuggling of chemical and explosives on board commercial aircraft indicated their intent to return to this tactic.

* In PAIB no. 10 of 20 November 2009, ITRR analysts provided translations of internal jihadist communications with specific intelligence-oriented details:

* An information request regarding what quantity of chemical-based explosives "can knock down an airplane"; and, "Which detonator is the best to blow up nitroglycerin?"

The reply provided by a fellow jihadist (known to ITRR Intelligence personnel as a SME in various Tactics Techniques and Procedures (TTP): "You can use a 1.5 volt battery and another small device that can make sparks, although if you do it in open spaces it will burn a little and it won't explode."

FBI analysis found that the device used by Umar Farouk Abdul Mutallab in the failed Christmas Day attack contained ***Pentaerythritol tetranitrate*** (PETN). It is a highly explosive compound related to the nitroglycerin used by military forces.

Other Relevant TTP Discussed

ITRR researchers further note that recent adversary communications from November and early December have dealt with the following relevant TTPs:

* The encouragement and use of lone-wolf terrorists to target CONUS and European countries including The Netherlands (Mutallab's departure point), Germany, France, Denmark and Switzerland.

* The call for tactics involving the use of small amounts of explosives.

* Discussion of the ability of a bomber to bypass current aviation security. This discussion also dealt with the successful smuggling of an IED on board aircraft for the attempted assassination of the Saudi Deputy Minister of Counterterrorism.

* The training in uses of small types of blast detonators.

* The use of small arms against targets with crowds of people such as airports.

*******ANALYSIS*******

Threat Level: MODERATE

In examining the tactical circumstances of the Christmas Day attack, ITRR analysts note a few salient aspects of the incident that have not yet been examined in depth:

1. The attempt at self-detonation was made a few minutes before the plane touched down. A possible reason for this decision on Mutallab's part may have been the fact that passengers and crew are buckled in their seats at that stage of the flight, making potential resistance or interference by passengers slower and more difficult (perhaps lessons learned from 9/11 or Richard Reid's failed airliner bombing attempt).

Furthermore, ITRR analysts note that the attempt to destroy the aircraft while it was landing was possibly an effort to increase collateral damage, by destroying the aircraft over populated areas and creating additional casualties on the ground.

2. The detonation of an American flag carrier in American airspace, rather than over the ocean or in Europe, would have had an added value in the view of jihadists worldwide, according to ITRR analysts. The US is seen as the primary enemy of the jihad today, such that any such attack upon American soil adds to the stature of Al-Qaeda and similar jihadist groups.

3. Additionally, an attack succeeding on Christmas would have the added value in jihadist eyes of turning an "infidel" holiday into a day of mourning.

Part of a Larger Plot?

There are mixed indications regarding the terrorist's affiliation with a larger jihadist conspiracy.

On the one hand, it is emerging that Mutallab had visited Yemen, home of a very active Al-Qaeda branch and of the recently killed influential jihadist Imam Awlaki and birthplace of the new leader of Al-Qaeda in the Horn of Africa. Furthermore, the material he obtained and methods he used may indicate training and supplies provided by experienced terrorist cells.

On the other hand, Mutallab is a highly educated man, from a family of means and power in Nigeria. His family indicated that he recently became more religious and attached to Islamist teachings. Such a profile fits the "self-starter," autodidact jihadist who is incited by Islamist religious leaders, lectures and texts that he discovers and absorbs independently. Such was apparently the case with the Ft. Hood terrorist gunman, Nidal Hasan. Mutallab's stated link to Al-Qaeda may therefore be ideological only, rather than practical.

The general consensus among terror analysts is that Al-Qaeda would prefer far larger scale attacks in the US homeland; however, the organization's strategy also does not preclude the desire to incite many small, lone-wolf style jihadist attacks, in order to spread uncertainty and fear. In that sense, any Al-Qaeda-inspired attack is part of their larger strategy.

Looking Ahead

ITRR analysts believe that the Christmas Day attempt to detonate an explosive device on a commercial airliner is part of a pattern that will continue. This is especially so as this is the 8th anniversary (22 December 2001) of Richard Reid's attempt to destroy an airliner with smuggled explosives. However, there is a high likelihood of additional attempts by lone-wolf, copy-cat terrorists beyond the current anniversary period.

ITRR continues to identify and analyze jihadist communications and other information received in conjunction with this incident. As of Sunday, 27 December 2009, it is of interest to note that jihadist communications have been almost entirely silent regarding the Christmas Day attack. This may indicate that it was not a planned effort by a designated Al-Qaeda cell; however, a firm conclusion cannot be reached as of this date.

Sectors: GOVERNMENT FACILITIES

FARC Terror Returns With a Vengeance (and a Partner)

The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) has apparently managed to return to violent attacks despite the Colombian government's relatively successful counterterror policies.

The most dramatic attack on a senior official since 2002 was perpetrated by FARC terrorists on 21 December 2009. Approximately 10 gunmen disguised as Colombian elite forces kidnapped *Caqueta* state Gov. Luis Francisco Cuellar from his home, killing a guard and injuring two others. (The use of security services' uniforms is an increasingly common terrorist tactic, as previously noted by ITRR analysts.) The day after Cuellar was abducted, troops sent to rescue him came across his dead body surrounded by explosives. His throat had been slit.

Four days later, on Saturday, FARC attackers set fire to two public buses just south of the Colombian capital, Bogota. Passengers were forced off the vehicle before the arson and no one was injured. However, in November of this year, six people were killed when FARC terrorists set fire to a mass transit vehicle in the southern Nariño area.

The latest attacks come shortly after a mid-December declaration by the FARC and Marxist National Liberation Army (ELN) announced an embryonic alliance to respond "firmly and belligerently" with the government of Colombian President Alvaro Uribe. This step appears to be part of a process FARC has been undertaking to review tactics and strategies since May 2009.

******* ANALYSIS*******

Threat Level: MODERATE

Students at local language schools, business travelers, tourists and healthcare volunteers from Pennsylvania located in Colombia and adjacent areas in South America should be apprised of the heightened threat of attack. Foreigners remain high-priority targets of kidnapping by both ideological terrorists and their narco-terrorist allies. Related warnings and instructions issued by local Colombian security forces should be heeded by all visitors.

No actionable intelligence at this time for the following sectors:

AGRICULTURE AND FOOD
DEFENSE INDUSTRIAL BASES
ENERGY
HEALTHCARE AND PUBLIC HEALTH
NATIONAL MONUMENTS AND ICONS
BANKING AND FINANCE
WATER
CHEMICAL
COMMERCIAL FACILITIES
CRITICAL MANUFACTURING
DAMS
EMERGENCY SERVICES
NUCLEAR REACTORS, MATERIALS, AND WASTE
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
COMMUNICATIONS
POSTAL AND SHIPPING

THREAT LEVEL	DESCRIPTION
LOW (Level 4)	Available intelligence and recent events indicate that hostile elements currently have little capability or intent to take action against the target. It is assessed that, although it cannot be ruled out, an attack or action is unlikely to be mounted based on current available intelligence.
MODERATE (Level 3)	Available intelligence and recent events indicate that hostile elements have the capability to take action against the target and that such action is within the adversary's current intent. It is assessed that an attack or action is likely to be a priority and might well be mounted.
SEVERE (Level 2)	Available intelligence and recent events indicate that hostile elements have an established capability and current intent to take action against the target and there is some additional information on the nature of the threat. It is assessed that an attack or action on the target is a priority and is likely to be mounted.
CRITICAL (Level 1)	Available intelligence and recent events indicate that hostile elements with an established capability are actively planning to take action against the target within a matter of days (up to two weeks). An attack or action is expected imminently.

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For additional information, please contact the TAM-C of the Institute of Terrorism Research and Response at: +1.215.922.1080 or info@terrorresponse.org

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