The Director of Central Intelligence
Terrorist Threat Integration Center
Interagency Intelligence Committee on Terrorism

8 November 2004

The intelligence information used for this assessment was dated July and earlier, and it formed the basis for the DHS decision to raise the threat level on 1 August to orange in three localities – New York City, Washington, D.C. and Northern New Jersey. The threat information was taken directly from an Intelligence Community assessment dated 15 September, "Homeland: Al-Qaida VBIED Threat." The Terrorist Threat Integration Center coordinated the 15 September assessment with the Central Intelligence Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of State/INR, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the National Security Agency. Following the Community's assessment is a section added by DHS to address suggested protective measures to counter the threat.

INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY TERRORIST THREAT ASSESSMENT

Homeland: Al-Qaida VBIED Threat

SUMMARY

(U//FOUO) The Intelligence Community assesses al-Qaida may be planning attacks in the United States using one or more vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIEDs). The plans may include attacks against several economic infrastructure targets in New York City, Washington, D.C., and Northern New Jersey.

(U//FOUO) Past al-Qaida VBIED attacks have involved devices containing from 200 to 1,500 kilograms (kg) of explosives, but earlier this year an estimated 20,000 kg of explosive precursors were seized in Jordan. To give context to the threat, we modeled a hypothetical scenario in which a VBIED is detonated in the middle of a street intersection in a generic urban area of 5- to 15-story buildings.[1] Three TNT-equivalent explosive weights and vehicle types were modeled: 1,000 kg (an SUV or limo), 7,000 kg (as might be carried in an urban delivery truck), and 18,000 kg (a typical 18-wheel tractor-trailer).

- **The modeling shows that, to be effective, a 1,000-kg VBIED must be close to the target building—and has a low probability of causing surrounding buildings to collapse—but a 7,000-kg VBIED probably would cause surrounding buildings within 100 meters (approximately a city block) to collapse, and an 18,000-kg VBIED**

1 The modeling is not directly applicable to buildings considerably taller than 15 stories. Such buildings often are built with stronger materials, and ranges for building collapse typically would be reduced. Very tall buildings should be considered individually.

probably would cause building collapse 150 meters from the blast, extending the collapse area into the blocks beyond the adjacent blocks.

- **For an 18,000-kg VBIED, flying debris from breaking windows would cause severe injuries or death out to 200 meters and injuries for most persons within 300 meters, nearly three city blocks from the detonation. For all three charge sizes some windows would break more than a kilometer from the blast—possibly causing injuries at that distance.**

Possible VBIED Threat to the Homeland

(U//FOUO) The Intelligence Community assesses al-Qaida may be planning one or more VBIED attacks in the United States. While we have not yet determined the exact targets, several economic infrastructure locations in New York City, Washington, D.C., and New Jersey may be intended for VBIED attacks.

- Information from terrorist sources shows that VBIED attacks were recommended for at least two of the locations. One was reminiscent of Ramzi Yousef's 1993 VBIED attack on the World Trade Center.

- Other potential targets include government and military facilities and bases, financial institutions, nuclear power plants, and critical infrastructure.

(U//FOUO) Vehicle bombs remain al-Qaida's primary weapon for high-profile attacks. The group has conducted or been linked to at least sixteen such attacks since 1998 and several others have been disrupted (see Table). Past attacks show that al-Qaida VBIED plots have typically involved multiple devices, each containing between 200 and 1,500 kg of improvised explosives. Several past al-Qaida-associated truck bombs have used similar quantities of explosives, and this amount can be carried in passenger vehicles with little to no modification. However, earlier this year an estimated 20,000 kg of precursor chemicals for explosives were seized by Jordanian security officials.

Intelligence Community Blast Modeling

(U//FOUO) To examine the range of threats from possible VBIEDs, the Community modeled detonations of several explosive amounts and the impact each would have in an urban setting. The explosive charges modeled ranged from 1,000 kg of TNT,[2] which could be carried by a reinforced sport utility vehicle (SUV) or limousine, to 7,000 kg, which might be carried by an urban delivery truck, to 18,000 kg of TNT, which would require a large vehicle such as an 18-wheel tractor-trailer.

- For a 1,000-kg charge size there probably would be no widespread building collapse, but severe injuries from walls being blown in probably would occur up to one block from the detonation. A limited portion of one building could

2 TNT (trinitrotoluene) is the explosive most commonly used as the reference for measuring explosive effects.

collapse, depending on the distance from the detonation to the closest structural column.

- Charge sizes such as 7,000-kg and 18,000-kg are likely to cause buildings to collapse in the four to nine square blocks surrounding the detonation, resulting in many deaths and injuries.

- Injuries due to breaking glass from a 1,000-kg device would extend over nine square blocks, while the area of injuries due to breaking glass from 7,000-kg and 18,000-kg VBIEDs will be two to four times greater.

Difficulties in Constructing Extremely Large VBIEDs

(U//FOUO) Bombmaking Expertise. The assembly of an improvised truck bomb containing several thousand kg of explosives can be difficult; partial detonations and misfires can occur from improperly storing or mixing the explosives. The Community believes attempts by inexperienced operatives to build large VBIEDs would be unlikely to succeed. However, even a partial detonation of a very large device could cause significant damage.

(U//FOUO) Procurement. Past VBIEDs built in the United States have demonstrated that operatives can gain access to raw materials used for making improvised explosives. The two major domestic VBIED attacks each used at least 1,000 kg of ingredients.

- In 1993, Ramzi Yousef used more than 500 kg of urea nitrate explosives and aluminum powder in the attack on the World Trade Center. He purchased the urea nitrate precursors in bulk quantities, buying approximately 450 kg of urea fertilizer and 650 kg of nitric acid.

- In 1995, more than 2,000 kg of ammonium nitrate was purchased for the VBIED used in the attack on the Murrah Federal Office Building in Oklahoma.

- Al-Qaida probably would purchase improvised explosives precursors—such as ammonium nitrate—in small quantities from various retailers to reduce the risk of detection.

Assembling a VBIED in the United States

(U//FOUO) A review of terrorist VBIED attacks suggests that the main charge of a device in the United States probably would be an improvised explosive made from ammonium nitrate, possibly mixed with a hydrocarbon or metallic fuel—such as aluminum powder, diesel fuel, or confectioners' sugar. These ingredients are commercially available—the U.S. produces approximately four million tons of ammonium nitrate annually—and, similar mixtures have been included in terrorist bombmaking courses for more than a decade.

Possible Vehicle Bomb Tactics

(U//FOUO) Al-Qaida and other terrorist groups have used several scenarios in VBIED attacks—with varying degrees of success—to get a VBIED close to the intended target. The group might return to these tactics—or some variant of them—in a Homeland attack.

- **Arming the driver and/or passengers**. This scenario requires only the acquisition of small arms for one or two people per VBIED.
- **Disguising the vehicle**. Several terrorist groups, including al-Qaida cells in Saudi Arabia, have built VBIEDs from ambulances or trucks painted to resemble official vehicles.
- **Using a lead assault team in a vehicle or on foot followed by a VBIED**. The three attacks in Riyadh on 12 May 2003, used operatives firing automatic weapons from lead vehicles to ensure that the VBIEDs that followed could clear any security obstacles.
- **Breaching charge followed by a VBIED**. Some terrorists have mentioned using small explosive charges as a way to overcome perimeter security and to ensure the device has access to its target. Egyptian Islamic Jihad conducted an attack using this tactic in 1995 against the Egyptian Embassy in Islamabad, Pakistan, but the debris from the gate blocked the VBIED, which detonated more than 80 feet from the targeted building.
- **Assault team firing from a fixed position to cover a VBIED approach**. On 9 November 2003, a Saudi al-Qaida cell attacked a housing compound in Riyadh using a small team of operatives providing cover fire for the VBIED from a fixed position nearby. In an urban environment, it may be difficult to get access to locations that would provide good firing positions near high-value targets.
- **Two VBIEDs working in tandem**. This tactic, employing two closely timed explosions, is difficult to implement and may result in the second VBIED being trapped in the crater or debris left by the first.

SUGGESTED PROTECTIVE MEASURES

(U//FOUO) All available antiterrorism measures should be rigorously reexamined, to include physical security perimeters and set back distances between security fences, key buildings, and barricades.

General Awareness Procedures

- Review current contingency plans and, if not already in place, develop and implement procedures for: receiving and acting on threat information; alert notification; terrorist incident response; evacuation; bomb threat; hostage and barricade situations; chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) attack; incident management procedures, accountability; and media relations.

- After implementing plans and procedures, conduct internal training exercises and invite local emergency responders (fire, rescue, medical and bomb squads) to participate in joint exercises.

- Coordinate and establish partnerships with local authorities and other business/facility owners to develop intelligence and information sharing relationships.

Security Personnel Procedures

- Arrange for law enforcement vehicles to be parked randomly near entrances and exits.

- Increase the number of visible security personnel wherever possible.
- Institute/increase vehicle, foot and roving security patrols varying in size, timing and routes.
- Implement random security guard shift changes.
- Approach all illegally parked vehicles in and around facilities, question drivers and direct them to move immediately; if the owner cannot be identified, have the vehicle towed by law enforcement.
- Institute a robust vehicle inspection program to include checking under the undercarriage of vehicles, under the hood, and in the trunk. Provide vehicle inspection training to security personnel.

Physical Security Procedures

- In addition to Jersey barriers and manned checkpoints, ensure appropriate use of ditching and berms to prevent vehicles from driving through perimeter fencing.
- Limit the number of access points and strictly enforce access control procedures.
- Rearrange exterior vehicle barriers, traffic cones, and road blocks to alter traffic patterns near facilities and cover by alert security forces.
- Consider installing telephone caller I.D.; record phone calls, if necessary.
- Increase perimeter lighting.
- Deploy visible security cameras and motion sensors.
- Deploy explosive detection devices and explosive detection canine teams.
- Conduct vulnerability studies focusing on physical security, structural engineering, infrastructure engineering, power, water, and air infiltration, if feasible.
- Install special locking devices on manhole covers in and around facilities.

- Where practical, prevent vehicular traffic from having a straight approach to the security checkpoint. This measure will preclude vehicles from reaching high rates of speed and crashing through the checkpoint.
- Consider installing remotely controlled barrier gates, remove controls at potential entry points for a VBIED and reinstall at a remote secure site with closed circuit TV and phones to monitor access. This would help counter an attack where terrorists kill guards and activate the barrier devices themselves.
- Facilities deemed to be high risk may consider establishing off-site delivery facilities where all vehicles bring outside cargo for screening.
- Establish multiple, layered entry points at high risk facilities.
- Post signs stating that vehicles parked in unauthorized areas will be towed immediately.
- Identify key areas in and/or adjacent to a facility where a terrorist could park a vehicle and be in close proximity to large numbers of personnel.
    - Prohibit vehicular parking in these areas or conduct a thorough search.
    - Monitor such areas with security cameras.
- Commercial bus and truck park operators should review current security procedures and consider counter theft measures as appropriate.
- Ensure all levels of personnel are notified via briefings, email, voice mail and signage of any changes in threat conditions and protective measures.
- Encourage personnel to be alert and immediately report any situation that appears to constitute a threat or suspicious activity.
- Encourage personnel to take notice and report suspicious vehicles.
- Encourage personnel to know emergency exits and stairwells and the locations of rally points to ensure the safe egress of all employees.

DHS encourages recipients of this Threat Assessment to report information concerning suspicious or criminal activity potentially related to terrorism to local law enforcement, the local FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force, or the Homeland Security Operations Center (HSOC). The HSOC may be contacted via telephone at (202) 282-8101 or via email at HSCenter@dhs.gov.