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2006-08-11

# Home-Grown Cell Implicated in Plot

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Monterey, California: Naval Postgraduate School

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<http://hdl.handle.net/10945/40747>



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### Home-Grown Cell Implicated in Plot

Friday, August 11, 2006

*SFGate.com article originally posted on Aug. 11, 2006 by Matthew B. Stannard*

Many of the early details of the alleged terror plot that unraveled in London Thursday echoed warnings that terrorism experts have repeated for five years: Al Qaeda and like-minded groups remain dangerous, are determined to exceed the devastation wrought in the Sept. 11 attacks and retain a near-obsession on using airplanes, one way or another, as weapons.

All of those predictions appeared to have been borne out by Thursday's events, with one significant exception: The fact that such a massive, seemingly sophisticated terror scheme was apparently laid by a homegrown group of British citizens traveling on legal passports rather than by hard-core foreign jihadists infiltrating Western countries.

"Typically the home-grown just haven't moved at that level," said David Brannan, a lecturer at the Center for Homeland Defense and Security at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey.

Home-grown cells have been implicated in terrorist actions before. They were at the heart of the investigation of an alleged terror scheme in Toronto that has led to 18 arrests since June as well as the successful attacks in Madrid in 2004 and in London in 2005.

The difference now is one of scale, Brannan said: The Madrid and London attacks took hundreds of lives between them, but they pale in comparison to what the British police officials described as "an attempt to commit mass murder on an unimaginable scale."

It is also possible, as both U.S. and British officials have suggested, that the 24 native Britons arrested at the very least received significant help from the more experienced members of al Qaeda.

"What it suggests to me is perhaps (al Qaeda is) using a specialist and bringing them in to lead home-grown to carry out the attacks. That might be the next way they can carry out spectaculars," Brannan said.

"You would think that, given the scope and sophistication of this plot, it would be unusual if there wasn't some direction or influence from outside the U.K.," John Carnt, a former deputy superintendent at Scotland Yard, told the Washington Post.

But whether or not homegrown terror cells are coordinating with overseas al Qaeda groups, many experts said, the more important issue is whether enough is being done to detect and stop home-grown terror cells --

which appear increasingly capable of pulling off "spectaculars" even without such assistance.

"My sense is that this next generation, these people we're really worrying about, are self recruited. These are self-generated jihadis ... inspired by al Qaeda," said William Rosenau, a terrorism expert at RAND. "The attention just hasn't been devoted to this question."

However, FBI director Robert Mueller warned in 2004 that al Qaeda "appears to recognize the operational advantage it can derive from recruiting U.S. citizens." Osama bin Laden himself suggested that he was inspiring a movement that could move far beyond the organization he dubbed al Qaeda, or "the base."

"People say Afghanistan was a real disaster for al Qaeda, but other analysts say it just accelerated this process, and helped them -- unintentionally -- reach their goal, which is to create this disparate set of movements that didn't need a center," Rosenau said. "I think the revolutionary software has already been embedded."

The importance of understanding the difference between home-grown and foreign terrorists has practical implications, the experts said. Home-grown terrorists may not need to travel through secure airports to reach their targets, for example, and are less likely to appear on watch-lists or arouse suspicion from law enforcement for looking or sounding out of place.

"When the threat has evolved as it has to this home-grown phenomenon in advanced societies, pretty nice places like the U.K. and Canada, most of the tools we have been using to date to identify terrorists ... are simply not adapting to that," said Stephen Flynn, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations.

But that's changing, said Gary LaFree, director of the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terror. The past few years has seen a surge of interest into research on "radicalization," the process by which a disgruntled, alienated citizen turns into a terrorist bent on violence and death, he said.

The solution to that problem might come less from the military experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq, the experts said, and more from traditional law enforcement experience.

"It doesn't sound very sexy: It's called community policing," Brannan said. "As police departments have become efficient at getting into these communities and developing relationships, more information is passed through those one-on-one relationships than has ever been passed through covert means."

The British are further ahead on that approach, and their connections to Islamic and immigrant communities through community policing may explain their several successes at disrupting late-stage terror plots, the experts said.

Brannan pointed as an example to a report in the Washington Post that the London plot was uncovered after a member of the local Islamic community contacted authorities with concerns about some of the suspects.

"If we can expand that, we'll be much more effective and not have to worry so much about civil rights," Brannan said.

The same approach may be even better suited to the United States, said Reza Aslan, a Research Associate at the USC Center on Public Diplomacy, because the Islamic population of the United States is much more educated, affluent and integrated than the Muslim population of Europe.

"The prevailing attitude is that the American Muslim community is so overwhelmingly against the use of religious violence and terrorism in the name of Islam that we are doing a pretty darn good job of policing ourself," said Aslan, author of "No God But God: The Origins, Evolution, and Future of Islam."

Federal law enforcement has reached a similar conclusion, Aslan said; FBI and Department of Homeland Security officials, for example, say they have stepped up their efforts to recruit from and communicate with the American Islamic communities, and experts said several cities -- notably New York -- have established innovative and effective means of coordinating with their own communities.

"I think that is one place in which the federal government has failed in the last six years, and they're starting to do a better job now of recognizing that the American Muslim community is part of the solution of dealing with home-grown terrorism than the problem."

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