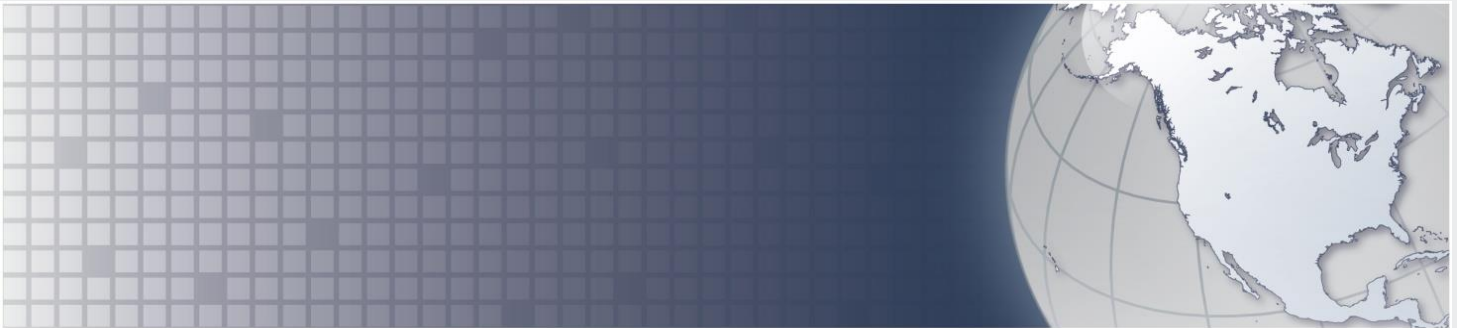




Homeland
Security

INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENT



(U//FOUO) Disrupted German Bomb Plot Reinforces Value of Suspicious Activity Reporting

7 August 2015

Office of Intelligence and Analysis

IA-0252-15

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(U//FOUO) **Disrupted German Bomb Plot Reinforces Value of Suspicious Activity Reporting**

(U//FOUO) Prepared by the Office of Intelligence and Analysis (I&A). Coordinated with the FBI, NCTC, NPPD, and the DHS Office of Bombing Prevention. Shared with the Commercial Facilities Sector-Sector Coordinating Council.

(U) **Scope**

(U//FOUO) This Assessment highlights potential tradecraft that might be employed by terrorist operatives and homegrown violent extremists (HVE) in an overt attempt to acquire precursor materials or in a covert attempt to conduct pre-operational surveillance.* This Assessment is intended to support the DHS activities to assist federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial government counterterrorism and law enforcement officials, first responders, and private sector security partners in effectively deterring, preventing, pre-empting, or responding to terrorist attacks against the United States.

(U) **Key Findings**

(U//FOUO) **A tip by a vigilant store clerk led German authorities to foil a possible attack, highlighting the importance of an informed public, strong public-private sector partnership, broad dissemination of established tripwires, and an awareness of the suspicious activity reporting program.**

(U//FOUO) **The plot underscores how pre-operational information gathering is a component of nearly all premeditated attacks. Terrorists often conduct physical surveillance to**

* (U//FOUO) DHS defines an HVE as a person of any citizenship who has lived or operated primarily in the United States or its territories and who advocates, is engaged in, or is preparing to engage in ideologically-motivated terrorist activities, including providing support to terrorism, in furtherance of political or social objectives promoted by a foreign terrorist organization (FTO) but who is acting independently of direction by a FTO. HVEs are distinct from traditional domestic terrorists who engage in unlawful acts of violence or to intimidate civilian populations or attempt to influence domestic policy without direction from or influence from a foreign actor.

identify suitable targets and determine security features or vulnerabilities, presenting further opportunities for the public, private sector, and local first responders to identify and report suspicious activities.

(U//FOUO) **Concerned citizens have successfully assisted in the disruption of two major terrorist plots in the Homeland after the perpetrators of the plots suspiciously attempted to acquire a precursor material.**

(U//FOUO) **German Plot Highlights the Critical Role of the Private Sector and First Responders in Identifying Suspicious Activity**

(U//FOUO) A late-march tip by a vigilant store clerk to local police about a potentially suspicious purchase of an explosive precursor led German authorities to foil a possible attack against a major sporting event in early-May, highlighting the importance of an informed public, strong public-private sector partnerships, broad dissemination of established tripwires and an awareness of the suspicious activity reporting program.¹ Following the tip, police in the state of Hesse investigated the incident and later arrested a male and female couple on 29 April after one of the suspects was observed conducting surveillance of various locations along a bicycle race route.² Pre-operational indicators of terrorist activity are often difficult to detect, and this incident reinforces the critical role the public, private sector, and local first responders can play in identifying behavior reasonably indicative of terrorism-related activity, and reporting that activity for further investigation.

» (U) The couple initially aroused the suspicions of a hardware store clerk after failing to produce the appropriate identification needed to purchase hydrogen peroxide, and then raised flags with the police after they discovered the couple presented fraudulent credentials.³ The couple claimed they wanted to use the hydrogen peroxide to clean their fish pond, but attempted to purchase a quantity far exceeding the amount needed, according to open

source reporting.⁴ Police later arrested the male suspect after observing him along the route of a 1 May bicycle race, according to a statement from the Frankfurt Public Prosecutor's Office cited in press reporting.⁵

- » (U) Upon searching the suspects' apartment, police discovered 100 rounds of ammunition, a military-style rifle, a fully functional pipe bomb, and 3 liters of hydrogen peroxide among other hazardous chemicals that could be used to make an improvised explosive device (IED), according to open source reporting.⁶ The police also confiscated 24,000 euros during the search, according to open source reporting citing a statement from Frankfurt's Public Prosecutor's Office.⁷
- » (U) The male suspect was known to police for previous criminal offenses, but was not the subject of an active counterterrorism investigation. Police have linked him to the violent-extremist community in the Frankfurt-area—which includes returned foreign fighters from the conflict in Syria—according to a statement from the Frankfurt Public Prosecutor's Office cited in press reporting.^{8,9}

(U//FOUO) Suspicious Activity Reporting Could Identify Pre-operational Surveillance

(U//FOUO) While this threat was ultimately disrupted, it is the latest example of terrorists' interest in targeting mass gatherings and non-ticketed sporting events. The incident highlights how pre-operational information gathering is a component of nearly all premeditated attacks. Terrorists often conduct physical surveillance to identify suitable targets and determine security features or vulnerabilities, presenting further opportunities for the public, private sector and local first responders to identify and report suspicious activities.

- » (U) The annual Eschborn-Frankfurt City Loop bicycle race held in May is a major sporting event in Germany that attracts thousands of participants and spectators, according to open source information.¹⁰ Following the arrest of the couple, German officials canceled the race as the investigation leading up to the event had not determined whether the couple had accomplices or had placed as-yet undetected explosive devices along the route, according to open source reporting citing police officials.¹¹
- » (U) Local police observed the male suspect in a wooded area along the route of the bicycle race in the Frankfurt area, raising concern the race was a target, according to a statement from the Frankfurt Public Prosecutor's Office cited in press reporting.¹²

(U//FOUO) Vigilance about Suspicious Activity Enables Disruption of Homeland Plotting

(U//FOUO) Concerned citizens have successfully assisted in the disruption of two major terrorist plots in the Homeland after the perpetrators of the plots suspiciously attempted to acquire a precursor material. In both cases, private sector employees alerted local law enforcement after encountering either a suspicious individual or package.

- » (U//FOUO) The FBI arrested Naser Jason Abdo^{USPER} in late July 2011 for plotting to attack soldiers from Ft. Hood, Texas at a restaurant in the nearby town of Killeen, Texas with an IED, according to the criminal complaint.¹³ Authorities disrupted the plot after Abdo raised the suspicions of a sales clerk at a local gun store when he arrived in a taxi, attempted to purchase several pounds of smokeless gun powder, and did not provide the clerk with an answer to the inquiry as to why Abdo was acquiring such a large quantity, according to open source reporting.¹⁴ Abdo was convicted in May 2012 and sentenced to life in prison in August 2012 for attempted use of a weapon of mass destruction and for possession of a weapon in furtherance of a federal crime of violence, according to an FBI press release.¹⁵
- » (U//FOUO) The FBI arrested Saudi national Khalid M. Aldawsari in late February 2011 after he took concrete steps to acquire chemicals necessary for an IED, for which he had conducted online research, including research on prospective targets, according to the criminal complaint. Aldawsari attempted to purchase a highly concentrated phenol solution—a precursor for the explosive tri-nitro-phenol or picric acid—and raised suspicions of a freight company in Texas after the delivery of an unexpected package from a North Carolina chemical company, according to the criminal complaint. Aldawsari attempted to bypass the chemical company's restriction on sending shipments to an individual or a residence, but didn't have permission from the freight company to have the package delivered.¹⁶ Aldawsari was sentenced to life in prison in June 2012 for attempted use of a weapon of mass destruction, according to a January 2014 FBI press release from the US Court of Appeals affirming his conviction.¹⁷

(U//FOUO) Behaviors Associated with Suspicious Material Acquisition of Explosive Precursors

(U//FOUO) Some observed activities that may be suspicious include constitutionally protected activity. These activities should not be reported absent articulable facts and circumstances that support the source agency's suspicion that the observed behavior is not innocent, but rather reasonably indicative of criminal activity associated with terrorism. Such indicators include those not necessarily assumed present in this case, material support to terrorist groups, violent extremism, radicalization or mobilization to violence, travel overseas to engage in violence, as well as the following:

- » (U//FOUO) Inquiries about the availability of explosive precursors such as highly-concentrated hydrogen peroxide, acetone, phenol, or acids, including nitric, sulfuric or citric; many of which are readily available in retail outlets.
- » (U//FOUO) Display of nervous behavior and lack of knowledge or evasive responses to inquiries about intended use;
- » (U//FOUO) Purchase or attempted purchase in quantities apparently exceeding personal needs or inconsistent with a customer's stated use, business, or purchase history;
- » (U//FOUO) Attempts to purchase all available stock of explosives precursors or to acquire materials in bulk without reasonable explanation, or making numerous smaller purchases of the same products at different locations within a short period of time—a possible sign of covert stockpiling;
- » (U//FOUO) Suspicious refusal or reluctance to provide full contact information;
- » (U//FOUO) Suspicious insistence on paying in cash for bulk purchases or using someone else's credit card;
- » (U//FOUO) Suspicious insistence on in-store pickup instead of store delivery of bulk purchase or a request for delivery to a location not generally associated with use of the material;
- » (U//FOUO) Suspicious use of a vehicle without commercial tags to transport large quantities of a material, or lack of proper identification or a uniform consistent with a specified delivery service or company of the end user of the material;

- » (U//FOUO) Suspicious use of rented or out-of-state vehicle to transport bulk purchases; and
- » (U//FOUO) Injuries consistent with experimentation with explosives and chemicals, such as missing fingers or scarring, discoloration, or burns on skin. [Efforts to construct explosive, chemical or incendiary devices by non-professionals often results in self-injury requiring emergency medical treatment. Recognition of suspicious injuries by emergency medical service (EMS) personnel can lead to the discovery and disruption of violent extremist activities.]*

(U) Implications

(U//FOUO) Continued vigilance by concerned citizens in recognizing overt attempts to acquire precursor material or covert attempts at conducting pre-operational surveillance may enable law enforcement to thwart the next homeland attack.

(U//FOUO) Pre-operational indicators of terrorist activity are often difficult to detect, and these disrupted plots reinforce the critical role the public, private sector and local first responders can play in identifying behavior reasonably indicative of terrorism-related activity, and reporting that activity for further investigation.

* (U//FOUO) DHS defines radicalization as the process through which an individual changes from a non-violent belief system to a belief system that includes the willingness to actively advocate, facilitate, or use unlawful violence as a method to effect societal or political change.

(U) Source Summary Statement

(U//FOUO) The *Assessment* is based on unclassified sources of information of varying reliability, including FBI criminal complaints and official US government press releases, and open source information. We have **medium confidence** in the government and open source information, some of which has been corroborated by public statements made by senior foreign government officials.

(U) Report Suspicious Activity

(U) To report suspicious activity, law enforcement, Fire-EMS, private security personnel, and emergency managers should follow established protocols; all other personnel should call 911 or contact local law enforcement. Suspicious activity reports (SARs) will be forwarded to the appropriate fusion center and FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force for further action. For more information on the Nationwide SAR Initiative, visit <http://nsi.ncirc.gov/resources.aspx>.

(U) Tracked by: HSEC-8.1, HSEC-8.2, HSEC-8.3, HSEC-8.5, HSEC-8.6

- ¹ (U); Devlin Barrett; Wall Street Journal; "Boston Bombings: 'Tripwires' Can Spot Would-Be Bombers"; 15 APR 2013; <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424127887324345804578425483373542340>; accessed on 05 MAY 2015.
- ² (U); Paul Cruickshank; CNN; "German police thwart Boston-style plot to bomb cycle race, source says"; 30 APR 2015; <http://www.cnn.com/2015.04.30.europe/Germany-terror-arrests>; accessed on 05 MAY 2015; (U).
- ³ (U); The Independent; "Germany 'foils Boston-style attack' on cycle event"; 30 APR 2015; <http://www.independent.ie/sport/other-sports/germany-foils-bostonstyle-attack-on-cycleevent-31186155.html>; accessed on 05 MAY 2015.
- ⁴ (U); Paul Cruickshank; CNN; "German police thwart Boston-style plot to bomb cycle race, source says"; 30 APR 2015; <http://www.cnn.com/2015.04.30.europe/Germany-terror-arrests>; accessed on 05 MAY 2015.
- ⁵ (U); The Independent; "Germany 'foils Boston-style attack' on cycle event"; 30 APR 2015; <http://www.independent.ie/sport/other-sports/germany-foils-bostonstyle-attack-on-cycleevent-31186155.html>; accessed on 05 MAY 2015.
- ⁶ (U); The Independent; "Germany 'foils Boston-style attack' on cycle event"; 30 APR 2015; <http://www.independent.ie/sport/other-sports/germany-foils-bostonstyle-attack-on-cycleevent-31186155.html>; accessed on 05 MAY 2015.
- ⁷ (U//FOUO); OSC; EUL2015050545036286; 4 MAY 15; 5 MAY 2015; (U//FOUO) German Media Report Further on Arrests of Suspected Terrorists in Oberursul, Hesse; accessed on 15 MAY 2015; (U//FOUO).
- ⁸ (U); The Independent; "Germany 'foils Boston-style attack' on cycle event"; 30 APR 2015; <http://www.independent.ie/sport/other-sports/germany-foils-bostonstyle-attack-on-cycleevent-31186155.html>; accessed on 05 MAY 2015.
- ⁹ (U//FOUO); OSC; EUL2015050545036286; 4 MAY 15; 5 MAY 15; (U//FOUO) German Media Report Further on Arrests of Suspected Terrorists in Oberursul, Hesse; accessed on 15 MAY 2015; (U//FOUO).
- ¹⁰ (U); Keys Corner; "The Eschborn-Frankfurt City Loop"; <http://www.keyscorner.com/archives/2009/05/01/the-eschborn-frankfurt-city-loop/>; accessed on 24 JUL 2015.
- ¹¹ (U); The Independent; "Germany 'foils Boston-style attack' on cycle event"; 30 APR 2015; <http://www.independent.ie/sport/other-sports/germany-foils-bostonstyle-attack-on-cycleevent-31186155.html>; accessed on 05 MAY 2015.
- ¹² (U); The Independent; "Germany 'foils Boston-style attack' on cycle event"; 30 APR 2015; <http://www.independent.ie/sport/other-sports/germany-foils-bostonstyle-attack-on-cycleevent-31186155.html>; accessed on 05 MAY 2015.
- ¹³ (U); United States District Court, Western District of Texas; *Criminal Complaint: United States of America v. Naser Jason Abdo*; 28 JUL 2011; pg. 1.
- ¹⁴ (U); Darren Barbee, Alex Branch and Chris Vaughn; Fort Worth Star Telegram; "AWOL soldier who plotted bombing in Fort Hood charged"; 29 JUL 2011; <http://www.star-telegram.com/2011/07/28/3254617/suspect-as-close-to-pulling-off.html>; accessed on 01 MAR 2012.
- ¹⁵ (U); FBI, San Antonio Division; Press Release; "Naser Jason Abdo Sentenced to Life in Federal Prison in Connection with Killeen Bomb Plot"; 10 AUG 2012; <http://www.fbi.gov/sanantonio/press-releases/2012/naser-jason-abdo-sentenced-to-life-in-federal-prison-in-connection-with-killeen-bomb-plot>; accessed on 19 May 2015.
- ¹⁶ (U); United States District Court, District of Northern Texas; *Criminal Complaint: United States of America v. Khalid M. Aldawsari*; 23 MAY 2011; Case Number: 5:11-MJ-017; pg 3-5.
- ¹⁷ (U//FOUO); FBI, Dallas Division; Press Release; "U.S. Court of Appeals Affirms Conviction and Sentence of Khalid Aldawsari"; 24 JAN 2014; <http://www.fbi.gov/dallas/press-releases/2014/u.s.-court-of-appeals-affirms-conviction-and-sentence-of-khalid-aldawsari>; accessed on 19 May 2015.



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☐ Author or adjust policies and guidelines

☐ Initiate a law enforcement investigation
☐ Initiate your own regional-specific analysis
☐ Initiate your own topic-specific analysis
☐ Develop long-term homeland security strategies
☐ Do not plan to use
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7. What did this product not address that you anticipated it would?

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