

SUICIDE BOMB SCARE

Antiterrorism officials are working overtime to head off attacks by homegrown, self-motivated fanatics

By Chitra Ragavan

Soon after the September 11 terrorist attacks, officials at the Pentagon's Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency began worrying that the next attack against the United States might involve the kind of deadly suicide bombings of malls, restaurants, or theaters that have been so widespread in Israel. So DARPA began a quiet collaboration with the Israeli government to use that country's vast video databases of suicide bombers approaching targets to develop biometric face and gait recognition software, sensors, radar, and other technologies to detect and deter suicide bombers, a former military official familiar with the program told *U.S. News*.

In fact, since 9/11, hundreds of U.S. bomb technicians, police chiefs, police officers, and FBI, Secret Service, and Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) agents have made repeated trips to Israel to learn from their counterparts and their extensive experience in detecting and deterring Palestinian suicide bombers. The train bombings in Madrid and London during the past two years and the U.S. military's daily bombardment from Iraqi insurgents' homemade bombs have only heightened the sense of urgency. Last month's arrests in Toronto and Paris of dozens of young Islamic men for allegedly plotting bombing attacks have raised the worry meter still further. Just a few days ago, FBI agents broke up what they described as a homegrown terrorist cell in Miami, arresting seven people for allegedly plotting attacks on the Sears



Tower in Chicago and the FBI and other federal buildings in Miami.

In a speech delivered before the City Club of Cleveland a day after the arrests, FBI Director Robert Mueller said that pockets of "self-radicalized" jihadists represent the new face of global terrorism. "These extremists are self-recruited, self-trained, and self-executing," said Mueller. "They answer not to a particular leader but to an ideology. In short, they operate under the radar. And that makes their detection that much more difficult."

Since last fall, the U.S. government has made it a top priority to understand what factors triggered this self-radicalization, especially among second- and third-generation Muslim youth in England, Spain, the Netherlands, and Canada, *U.S. News* has learned. "Understanding radicalism," says a senior U.S. intelligence official, "has become a high, high concern from the White House on down." In the coming months, the FBI, the Department of

THE NEXT ATTACK

Regardless of what you think about the timing of an attack, what two methods are most likely to be used in America by global terrorists?

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS WHO SELECTED

Suicide bombing attack	67
Attack on major infrastructure	66
Attack using radiological weapon	20
Cyberattack	12
Attack on chemical or nuclear plants	11
Chemical weapon attack	10
Biological weapon attack	9
Nuclear weapon attack	6

Sources: *Foreign Policy* magazine and the Center for American Progress



GRIM KNOWLEDGE. Police in New York and other cities have been taking advice from Israel on the prevention and response to suicide bombings, like this one at a Netanya shopping mall.



Homeland Security, and the National Counterterrorism Center will issue independent reports on radicalization abroad and its implications at home. “We are not going to wait till we get hit,” the official said. “We want to understand it now so we can try to prevent it.”

“It’s coming.” According to a nonpartisan survey released in June of more than 100 top foreign-policy experts, the most likely form of attack on American soil is a suicide bombing—far more likely, they said, than a chemical or biological attack, an attack on a nuclear power plant, or a so-called dirty (radiological) bomb; 67 percent said that the next big attack on American soil, though perhaps years away, is likely to be a suicide bombing. “It’s coming. You know it’s coming,” says James Cavanaugh, a senior ATF official and top explosives expert who just returned from Israel. “Al Qaeda has made suicide terrorism the binding force of the jihad movement.”

Many of the state and local law enforcement training trips are organized and paid for by Jewish groups with close ties to Israel, such as the Anti-Defamation League, the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs, and the American Israel Public Affairs Committee. The Israeli government also has sent its police commanders and top bomb experts to the United States to brief thousands of police officers and the feds. Maj. Gen. Mickey Levy, the police attaché at the Israeli Embassy in Washington, D.C., has done a lot of the training. As commander of the Jerusalem police, Levy supervised investigations of 42 suicide bombings in four years that killed 356 people and wounded 1,500 others. “It was a rough four years, believe me,” says Levy.

In June 2001, Chuck Wexler, executive director of the Police Executive Research Forum, a progressive U.S. policing group, invited Levy and his colleagues to tour the World Trade Center’s emergency operations command. “We showed them a structure that we thought was impenetrable,” remembers Wexler. Three months later, watching the towers crumble to the ground like so much gray confetti, Levy was stunned. “I said to myself, ‘It’s unbelievable; it’s unbelievable.’” Despite 9/11, translating the Israeli policing experience to Americans is a huge challenge. “We are not psychologically prepared to deal with it yet,” says former U.S. Capitol Police Chief Terrance Gainer, who traveled to Israel three years ago. “Our police departments are inching towards it, as they implement new policies and procedures.”

Last July, the International Associa-

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tion of Chiefs of Police issued controversial new training guidelines advising officers to shoot suicide bombers in the head to prevent detonation. Two weeks later, London police, using a similar policy, shot to death a Brazilian man wrongly suspected as a suicide bomber. Some U.S. police chiefs believe that it's important to prepare bomb technicians and SWAT teams. But they say training street patrol officers, who have long been drilled in the use of defensive maneuvers, in these new offensive tactics is premature and risky, given the still largely hypothetical threat. "We go down that path at our own peril," says Miami Police Chief John Timoney, who just returned from Israel, "because there's going to be a bleed-over effect in ordinary dealings with average citizens."

Varied threats. The FBI recently distributed a two-hour suicide bomb response training CD-ROM to police departments nationwide. But the FBI's counterterrorism chief, Joseph Billy, discounts the notion that the next attack will definitely be a suicide bombing. "Suicide bombers are certainly the most confounding thing for us," says Billy. "But there are still truck bombs that are remotely detonated and other plots without martyrdom operations. Our awareness level has to be on all fronts, not just suicide."

Regionally, the Pennsylvania Southeastern Counterterrorism Task Force and the Philadelphia police have conducted some of the most exhaustive first-responder training, with the help of Philadelphia police bomb squad commander Lt. Tom Fitzpatrick, a former U.S. Special Forces soldier who has spent his own money and time to travel numerous times to Israel and other countries to study suicide bombings. "It's obvious that it's a global movement," says Fitzpatrick. "We haven't been hit to the extent other countries have been hit on an ongoing basis yet." Despite the high levels of concern, the Department of Homeland Security has raised eyebrows in recent weeks by cutting terrorism prevention grants to New York and Washington, D.C., and placing Las Vegas — widely viewed as a prime terrorist target—on a "sustainment list," which could result in the city being dropped from the funding list altogether next year. That worries Sheriff Bill Young, the head of the Las Vegas police department. "We have gone to extraordinary lengths," Young says, "in providing for our tourists' safety." Many big Las Vegas casinos have hired former FBI officials as heads of security and are beefing up intelligence capabilities as much as possible, without

breaking the city's signature "What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas" marketing promise. Las Vegas police officers have undergone suicide bombing response training, and Young is trying to get the city's 6,500 private casino security personnel on the same page.

The Los Angeles Police Department is on the cutting edge of suicide bomb response training and has deployed unprecedented security for high-profile events like the Academy Awards ceremony. Detective Ralph Morten, a former marine, 28-year LAPD veteran, and member of the bomb squad, has traveled to Israel seven times since 2002 and six times to Iraq and is helping train police departments all over California, as well as U.S. marines deployed to Iraq, about suicide bomber response. "I'm not sure we can stop these attacks from happening," says Morten. "But we sure can make it more difficult." Morten helped create a training bulletin on legal and tactical issues for LAPD officers. He and John Miller, then chief of the LAPD's counterterrorism and criminal intelligence bureau, also produced the nation's first suicide bomber interdiction training video.

The LAPD has tested and deployed thermal imaging sensors at public events, like a recent Emmy Awards ceremony, says Miller, who's now the FBI's chief spokesman. A cautionary coda: Prior to the event, the LAPD had exhaustively tested the sensor on volunteers so that officers could train their eyes to discern guns, bombs, and other objects under clothing. On Emmy night, the LAPD posted sharpshooters and plainclothes and uniformed interdiction teams around the Shrine Auditorium. Suddenly, the officer deploying the sensor reported spotting four cylindrical tubes under the jacket of a man waiting to buy tickets, much to Miller's confusion and alarm. Miller thought perhaps it was just another volunteer.

"So I asked, 'You guys still practicing?'" says Miller. "They said, 'This is not a drill.' I said, 'Oh, Oh!'" The interdiction teams swarmed in, grabbed the man, pinned his arms, and carted him away. But the mysterious tubes were merely two pairs of binoculars.

"It shows the system worked, and it shows that you have to be careful with it," says Miller. "Because if you go on the idea that any time you see a potential threat, that it's a head shot, you're going to be killing a lot of guys with binoculars. It's got to be the totality of information." ●

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