

**UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY//LAW ENFORCEMENT
SENSITIVE**

**U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Transportation Security Administration**

Subject: Terrorist Threat to U.S. Highway System



Threat Assessment

(U) Overview

(U//FOUO) Threats to the U.S. highway system (including tunnels, bridges, long-haul buses, school buses, and commercial trucks) emanate from transnational and domestic terrorist organizations, as well as from insiders and special interest groups. However, the primary threat stems from al-Qa'ida, its affiliates, and other Sunni Muslim extremists, whether foreign or domestic. No reporting indicates a current, credible, and specific terrorist threat to U.S. highway interests. However, since 1993 at least three terrorist plots to bomb tunnels and bridges in the United States have been disrupted, aborted, or abandoned. Further, recurring suspicious incidents involving U.S. highway infrastructure and assets could reflect pre-operational terrorist planning. Thus far, however, no definitive link has been established between any of the suspicious incidents and terrorism.

(U) Most Likely Actors

(U//FOUO) The most significant threat to the U.S. highway system is from al-Qa'ida and affiliated groups, to include al-Qa'ida sympathizers within the United States. Other transnational groups, such as Lebanese Hizballah and the Palestinian Islamic Resistance (HAMAS), maintain a presence in the United States; however, such groups are not likely to attack the United States absent a major provocation, such as U.S.-led military action targeting Iran or them. Although no information indicates a current threat, Hizballah has been linked to previous anti-U.S. terrorist attacks, including the bombings in Beirut, Lebanon, of the U.S. Embassy and U.S. Marine Barracks in 1983, and of the U.S. Embassy Annex in September 1984.

(U) Threats

(U) *Al-Qa'ida*

(U//FOUO) Al-Qa'ida, its affiliates, and like-minded jihadists pose the most serious threat to the U.S. highway infrastructure. Militants associated with al-Qa'ida have been linked to actual and suspected terrorist plots aimed at tunnels and bridges inside the United States and elsewhere overseas. Even if an attack on a tunnel or bridge did not cause it to collapse, the resulting damage would likely temporarily close the structure, snarl traffic, and frighten commuters.

(U//FOUO) In summer 2004, DHS and the FBI received uncorroborated reporting on an alleged plot targeting commercial transportation in major U.S. cities. Buses and railways were assessed as possible targets. The plot called for the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) possibly constructed of ammonium nitrate fertilizer and diesel fuel (ANFO) concealed in luggage and carry-on bags to include duffel bags and back packs.

(U//FOUO) In June 2003, Ohio truck driver Iyman Faris pled guilty to providing material support to terrorists from late 2000 to March 2003 for plots against targets in the United States. Al-Qa'ida's senior leadership instructed Faris to get equipment, including "gas cutters," for cutting suspension wires in the Brooklyn Bridge. Faris assessed the bridge plan as not feasible due to increased security and the bridge's design. Faris possessed a hazardous material (HAZMAT) endorsement.

(U) In 2002, a Spanish journalist in Afghanistan's Tora Bora region found an al-Qa'ida training manual, written in a Persian dialect, containing a chapter on attacking bridges.

(U//FOUO) In December 2001, the U.S. Department of Justice released excerpts from an al-Qa'ida training manual that described "blasting and destroying bridges leading into and out of cities" of "godless regimes" as one of al-Qa'ida's primary missions.

(U//FOUO) According to press reporting, al-Qa'ida was linked to a failed plot to blow up bridge crossings connecting the West Bank and Jordan in the 1999-2000 "Millennium" plot.

(U//FOUO) In 1993, the FBI disrupted the "Day of Terror" plot, organized by followers of Sheikh Rahman, to target key U.S. landmarks. The militants were planning to blow up landmarks

in New York City, including the Lincoln and Holland Tunnels, the George Washington Bridge, the United Nations, and the New York FBI Office.

(U//FOUO) The arrest of up to 41 members of a suspected al-Qa'ida support network in Spain between late 2001 and early 2005, uncovered evidence that indicates a possible terrorist interest in U.S. bridges. A collection of videotapes filmed in 1997 and linked to one of the suspects, Ghasoub Abrash Ghalyoun, appear to be casing videos of the World Trade Center, the Golden Gate and Brooklyn Bridges, and other U.S. landmarks.

(U) *Insiders*

(U//FOUO) Another potential threat to the U.S. highway system is the “insider”—i.e., an individual with a job within the highway industry (e.g., maintaining, buildings, or operating bridges, tunnels, trucks, and buses) who for personal or political reasons harbors a grudge or hostility toward his employer. Insiders are dangerous because their intimate industry knowledge enables them to pinpoint critical vulnerabilities. Insiders could help terrorists gain access to sensitive areas or use their own authorized access and expert knowledge to sabotage highway infrastructure.

(U) *Lone Wolves*

(U) Another threat emanates from “the lone wolf.” This refers to a lone individual who commits violent acts to achieve their own political or personal goals. The most famous example is Ted Kaczynski, the “Unabomber,” who conducted a series of bombings against airline, academic, and technology-related targets in the 1980s and 1990s. Like the industry insider, lone wolves have specific personal agendas or grudges against their targets, making them extremely difficult to preempt or to identify until a pattern emerges.

(U) *Right-Wing Extremists*

(U//FOUO) Domestic right-wing and special interest groups are also of concern. In November 1996, three members of the Georgia Republic Militia were convicted for possession of explosive devices, illegal weapons, and conspiracy to use a weapon in a violent crime. The men had threatened to attack government infrastructure, to include bridges, in response to a perceived takeover of the United States by “United Nation Forces.” In addition, the FBI assesses that special interest extremism focusing on environmental and animal rights has increased. Two of the noteworthy special interest groups are the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) and the Environmental Liberation Front (ELF). The ELF historically has used incendiary devices to damage and destroy construction sites and equipment, to include equipment used to build logging roads.

(U) *Left-Wing Extremists*

(U//FOUO) Left-wing groups also pose a potential threat to the U.S. highway system. These groups advocate civil disobedience to draw attention to their cause, and often use traffic disruption techniques such as blockading bridges, tunnels, and economically or politically important highway corridors. In 2000, during a 2000 meeting of the International Monetary Fund in Washington, D.C., activists posing as FBI agents asked local officials to close major transportation routes and high-occupancy vehicle lanes

during peak traffic hours. Protestors have also used low-yield explosives and incendiary devices such as Molotov cocktails and stink bombs to disorient crowds and law enforcement officers.

(U) *Religious Extremists*

(U//FOUO) Religious extremists pose a potential terrorist threat in the United States. The Jammāt-ul-Fuqra (JUF) is a Sufi Islamic extremist sect of predominantly African-American Muslims with an estimated 1,000 to 3,000 members nationwide. The JUF seeks to purify Islam through violence, and has links with al-Qa'ida. In 1993, a JUF member was arrested as part of the Ramzi Yousef plot to bomb sites in New York City, to include the Lincoln and Holland Tunnels and the George Washington Bridge. A 1989 raid of a JUF residence by Colorado law enforcement uncovered surveys of electrical, gas, oil, and water facilities in Colorado, suggesting possible JUF intentions to attack such infrastructures.

(U) *Incidents*

(U) *Suspicious Activity*

(U//FOUO) Since 2004, TSA has monitored suspicious activity involving all modes of transportation, to include many reports of suspicious activity involving bridges, tunnels, trucks, and buses. While such activity may be indicative of pre-operational surveillance and planning, no evidence has been uncovered to link any of the reported incidents to terrorism.

(U//LES) In May 2006, two passengers in an identified vehicle were observed filming the inside of the Fort McHenry Tunnel. The underwater tunnel is a key link on the Northeast Corridor's most important Interstate route, Interstate-95, between New Jersey and Florida.

(U//FOUO//LES) In April 2006, a commercial fuel carrier firm in Normal, Illinois, received a suspicious application for a hazardous material (HAZMAT) truck driver position. The subject was interested only in a position as a solo driver of a fuel tanker truck. The subject listed no experience as a commercial truck driver, but claimed to possess an Indiana Class D Commercial Driver's License (CDL). The subject's contact information and work history apparently were fraudulent.

(U//FOUO) During a routine traffic stop in March 2006, a Spanish national had in his possession a computer flash drive that contained photographs of critical infrastructure and key resources in various U.S. cities, mainly on the East Coast. The photographs were of large buildings; bridges; public transportation; roadway tunnels; tugboats; hazardous materials signs; police stations and police officers; fire stations; and churches.

(U//LES) In October 2005, while traveling southbound on Interstate 395 (I-395) from Maryland to Virginia via the I-395 tunnel in Washington, D.C., a source observed a car with five or six dark skinned males videotaping the tunnel.

(U//FOUO//LES) In August 2005, two young Caucasian males who identified themselves as foreign travelers from France, asked permission to take pictures of school buses on a sales lot in St. James, Missouri. The lot owner became suspicious when the men began taking detailed

photographs of the school buses, including of buses' cross-view mirrors and security cameras.

(U//FOUO) In May 2005, a Truck Air Transportation Company trailer loaded with 30,000 pounds of azinphos methyl, an organic phosphate pesticide, was stolen from a truck stop in Rock Hill, South Carolina, at an exit on I-77. In early April 2005, HAZMAT trucks were surveilled at an I-77 rest stop in South Carolina, just 12 miles from the trailer theft in Rock Hill. Three individuals drove in circles around the rest area while casing the trucks. The driver was described as Caucasian, the two passengers as Asian.

(U//FOUO) In May 2005, Tariq Javid, the alleged leader of a cell of the Sipah-e-Sahaba (SES) in New York, was arrested for lying on immigration documents concerning his terrorist ties. According to press reporting, Javid had been seen taking pictures of New York's Brooklyn and Williamsburg Bridges in 2004. Based in Pakistan, the SES is a violent radical Sunni terrorist group that is pro-al-Qa'ida.

(U//FOUO) In March 2005, two males, possibly of Middle Eastern descent, were observed in a silver Nissan Ultima videotaping the entire length of the eastbound Allegheny Tunnel, which lies along the I-76 Pennsylvania Turnpike.

(U) Tactics

(U//FOUO) Al-Qa'ida and other groups have demonstrated the capability and intent to attack highway infrastructure, including buses, bridges, and tunnels, with conventional explosives, vehicle-borne bombs, and suicide bombers.

(U) *Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs)*

(U//FOUO) For decades, IEDs have been the preferred terrorist tactic for attacking highway infrastructures and resources, to include bridges and passenger buses. Because powerful and highly effective IEDs can be easily made from readily available components, these devices pose the primary threat to the U.S. highway system. Groups ranging from the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) to separatists in India and Indonesia have used IEDs in attacks against bridges. Terrorists have also used IEDs to bomb passenger buses overseas, including in the United Kingdom, Israel, India, Pakistan, Turkey, Colombia, Laos, Greece, China, and the Philippines. In a noteworthy trend, terrorists and insurgents have used IEDs to bomb passenger buses in Iraq. The success of bus bombings overseas could encourage terrorists to attempt similar attacks in the United States.

(U//FOUO) The following are typical of IED attacks on highway infrastructures and assets overseas:

(U) On January 12, 2006, suspected FARC rebels bombed a bridge in Putumayo Department, Colombia, severing the road connection between Putumayo and Ecuador. The road was a key link along the truck route for transporting crude oil from Colombia to Ecuador.

(U//FOUO) On July 7, 2005, jihadist suicide backpack bombers carried out coordinated, nearly simultaneous bombings of three subway trains and a double-decker bus in London, United Kingdom, killing 56 people. Two weeks later, terrorists failed in a similar attempt to bomb three

subway trains and a double-decker bus in London.

(U//FOUO) On July 7, 2005, suicide bombers with backpack bombs carried out coordinated, nearly simultaneous bombings in London of three subway trains and one double-decker bus, killing 56 people. Two weeks later, on July 21, terrorists in London failed in an apparent copycat attempt to bomb three more subway trains and one more double-decker bus.

(U) On August 8, suspected United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) rebels detonated a bomb in the busy bus station in Boko, Assam State, India, killing four people and injuring three others.

(U//FOUO) On August 8, a suicide bomber killed himself and injured 31 passengers on a bus in Fuzhou, China.

(U) *Vehicle-Borne IEDs*

(U//FOUO) Vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIEDs) are among the preferred weapons of terrorists. VBIEDs are relatively easy and cheap to make, and often have a benign appearance: Virtually any vehicle, including tractor-trailer trucks, gas tankers, school buses, and motor coaches, could be converted into a VBIED. Colombian groups such as the FARC and the National Liberation Army (ELN) have used VBIEDs multiple times to attack bridges. British police foiled Irish Republic Army (IRA) plots in 1994 and in 1996 to target the Channel Tunnel using VBIEDs.

(U) *Ships as Weapons Targeting Bridges/Highway Infrastructure*

(U//FOUO) Al-Qa'ida has demonstrated the capability to use ships packed with explosives to attack U.S. and Western vessels. Individuals linked to al-Qa'ida are suspected in the boat bomb attacks against the USS Cole in 2000 as well as the MV Limburg oil tanker in 2002. Terrorists could also use this tactic against U.S. bridges, though no information indicates a specific threat.

(U) Ships or barges do not have to be converted into IEDs to cause damage to a bridge. This was tragically illustrated in September 1993, when night fog caused a barge to ram into a railroad bridge in Mobile, Alabama, displacing the track. Shortly thereafter, an Amtrak passenger train derailed on the bridge and plunged into water below. Forty-seven people perished and 111 were injured in the accident, Amtrak's worst ever.

(U//FOUO) Another example of ships or barges causing damage to bridges occurred in the Saint Lawrence Seaway in late 1984. In this incident, the Saint Lawrence Seaway was shutdown for 18 days, trapping 165 ships, when the Valleyfield Lift Bridge in Quebec was hit by a ship and collapsed. Rail and highway traffic was also halted.

(U) *Standoff Weapons*

(U//FOUO) No information indicates a credible and specific threat to the U.S. highway system from standoff weapons.

(U) *Sabotage of Equipment and Communications*

(U) As evidenced by the power grid failures in the Northeast in August 2003, the loss of signals could severely disrupt traffic along roads, bridges, tunnels, and highways. Additionally, as noted above, an attack that damaged a tunnel's ventilation system could be more effective at shutting down a tunnel than a small explosion. Apart from the Hampton Roads Tunnel incident and ELF incendiary attacks on construction equipment, sabotage has not been a significant problem for the U.S. highway system.

(U) *Cyber Threat*

(U//FOUO) Although al-Qa'ida and other groups have expressed an interest in computer network attacks, no information indicates a current and specific threat. However, terrorists could develop this cyber capability quickly and without warning, and could wreak havoc in automated traffic signaling systems.

(U) Conclusion

(U//FOUO) Threats to the U.S. highway system come from a wide variety of potential sources, including insiders, special interest organizations, extremist groups, and transnational terrorists. Al-Qa'ida, its affiliates, and other Sunni jihadists, foreign and domestic, pose the greatest threat. The threat posed by domestic extremist and special-interest groups such as the ELF and anti-globalization movement pose the least severe threat as these groups are looking to temporarily disrupt traffic as opposed to cause mass casualties.

Dissemination:

DERIVED FROM:
DECLASSIFY ON:

Multiple Sources

Author: Alvin Hickson
Date Created: 06/21/2006
Country(ies) Involved: United States
Terrorist Involvement/Group: