

WebMemo



Published by The Heritage Foundation

No. 3446
January 9, 2012

Forty-Fourth Terrorist Plot Against the U.S. Marks Need for Continued Vigilance

Jessica Zuckerman

On Saturday night, 25-year-old Sami Osmakac was arrested in connection to an alleged Islamist-inspired terrorist plot in Tampa, Florida. Osmakac, a naturalized U.S. citizen born in the former Yugoslavia, is believed to have planned to use vehicle bombs, assault rifles, grenades, and other explosives in an attack on possible targets including night clubs, businesses, and a local sheriff's office.

His arrest was the result of an undercover operation in which the FBI had been monitoring Osmakac for months. Osmakac's arrest marks the 44th terrorist plot foiled against the U.S. since 9/11 and serves as a strong reminder that the global war against terrorists is not yet won.

The Osmakac Plot. According to a complaint affidavit, the FBI was alerted to the plans of Sami Osmakac in September 2011 when an unnamed source became concerned following a request by Osmakac to purchase al-Qaeda flags. Shortly thereafter, Osmakac discussed his plans for violent attack with the informant and outlined his potential targets. When Osmakac asked for help in obtaining firearms and other weapons, the informant then introduced him to an undercover FBI agent from whom Osmakac attempted to purchase an AK-47-style machine gun, Uzi submachine guns, high-capacity magazines, grenades, and an explosive belt.

In a later meeting with the FBI agent, Osmakac indicated that he wished to carry out a multi-

pronged assault, beginning with vehicle explosive attacks and then employing an explosive belt to "get in somewhere where there's a lot of people" and take hostages. On Saturday, Osmakac was arrested following a joint investigation conducted by the FBI Tampa Division and the Tampa Joint Terrorism Task Force.

Forty-Fourth Terror Plot. Osmakac's arrest marks at least the 44th terrorist plot foiled against the U.S. since 9/11. Like this most recent plot, the vast majority of the attempted attacks against the U.S. have been foiled through the swift, concerted effort of the law enforcement and intelligence communities.

Increasingly, a number of attempted terrorist plots have been undertaken by individual or small-group actors with few or no direct ties to transnational terrorist organizations, such as al-Qaeda. Yet what this week's thwarted attack once again shows is that "lone wolf" operations can be stopped when law enforcement is given the intelligence and investigatory tools they need.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:
<http://report.heritage.org/wm3446>

Produced by the Douglas and Sarah Allison
Center for Foreign Policy Studies

Published by The Heritage Foundation
214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE
Washington, DC 20002-4999
(202) 546-4400 • heritage.org

Nothing written here is to be construed as necessarily reflecting the views of The Heritage Foundation or as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any bill before Congress.

The Osmakac plot should serve as another reminder that the war against terrorists is not yet won. While Osmakac was stopped long before the American public was put in harm's way, terrorists continue to seek to harm the U.S. and injure and kill its people.

Thwarting the Next Attempted Attack. The threat of terrorist attack remains real, and the U.S. should continue its vigilance. Yet key holes within the U.S. counterterrorism enterprise remain unfilled. In order to thwart the next attempted attack, Congress and the Administration should:

- **Ensure that vital counterterrorism tools are maintained.** Of the 44 attempted terrorist plots foiled since 9/11, only three were not stopped in the early stages of preparation. While these three plots may have appeared too close for comfort, the vast majority of plots have been foiled early on through the actions of law enforcement and intelligence. Key investigative tools such as the PATRIOT Act, having helped to thwart numerous attempted attacks in the past, remain vital in ensuring that law enforcement and intelligence authorities have the essential counterterrorism tools they need. In order to ensure that such vital counterterrorism tools are maintained, Congress should seek to make the three sunset provisions of the PATRIOT Act permanent.
- **Examine information-sharing gaps.** Efforts to increase information sharing between the U.S. and its allies while improving interagency communications among the Departments of State, Justice, and Homeland Security and intelligence agencies are vital to protecting the U.S. from the continued threat of terrorism. Increased efforts at information sharing would amplify efficiency

and timeliness in the counterterrorism field. Yet all too often, information sharing does not make for truly crosscutting communication but rather simply entails state and local law enforcement sending information up to the federal government. This gap in information sharing should not be allowed to continue.

- **Clarify the role of state and local law enforcement.** An increasing number of the attempted terrorist plots against the U.S. have been undertaken by individual or small group “lone wolf” actors. With this changing profile of terrorist threats, adaptive approaches to counterterrorism—including fostering a greater role for state and local governments—are essential. State and local law enforcement know their communities best and are most likely to notice when something is not quite right. While the threat of Osmakac's plot was first raised by a concerned citizen, the American public should not be the first line of defense. State and local law enforcement can extensively aid federal law enforcement and intelligence in thwarting future attempted attacks.

The Continued Threat. Unfortunately, this week's thwarted attack will not be the last terrorist plot attempted against the U.S. Ensuring that the next attempted attack is stopped early on requires that the U.S. be committed to maintaining a strong and enduring counterterrorism enterprise.

—*Jessica Zuckerman is a Research Assistant in the Douglas and Sarah Allison Center for Foreign Policy Studies, a division of the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for International Studies, at The Heritage Foundation.*