

# ISSUE BRIEF

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## 61st Terrorist Plot Against the U.S.: Terry Lee Loewen Plot to Attack Wichita Airport

*Cassandra Lucaccioni*

A 58-year-old man in Wichita, Kansas, was arrested and charged Friday morning with allegedly plotting to detonate a bomb at the Kansas Mid-Continent Airport.<sup>1</sup>

This recent plot marks the 61st thwarted terrorist plot against the United States since 9/11. This event is yet another reminder of the need to remain vigilant against the ongoing and evolving threat of Islamist terrorism and radicalization within the U.S.

**The Plot.** Terry Lee Loewen, an avionics technician at the Wichita airport, had been under investigation by Wichita law enforcement and the FBI since early summer 2013 due to his expressed interest in anti-American activities, including supporting violent jihad and downloading online documents about jihad and martyrdom and the “Al-Qaeda Manual.”

According to the Associated Press, Loewen had “been under investigation for about six months, after he made online statements about wanting to commit ‘violent jihad’ against the U.S. The statements were made in a conversation with an FBI special agent unknown to Loewen.”<sup>2</sup> Loewen wrote to the FBI employee in a previous online conversation, saying, “Let me preface the bottom line by saying I have become ‘radicalized’ in the strongest sense of

the word, and I don’t feel Allah wants me any other way.”<sup>3</sup> In the documents released by FBI agents, Loewen is said to have spent months studying the airport’s layout, flight patterns, passenger volume, and components of the building.

Through a carefully executed plan, FBI agents allowed Loewen to unfold his desires and plans without allowing him to pose any real threat. In a sting operation, “FBI employee 2,” as named in the court documents, was with Loewen when he attempted to wire and construct the bomb. Unknown to Loewen, the bomb materials supplied by “FBI employee 2” were inert.

Loewen attested that he was able to retrieve the wiring materials still needed for the bomb from his place of employment. He also declared that he could and would wire the device, as that was part of his current job responsibilities. Following the creation of the device, Loewen and “FBI employee 2” created the plan to drive to the airport and use Loewen’s badge to gain access to the tarmac and terminal.

Upon arrival at the airport tarmac with the dummy explosive in the trunk of the car, Loewen accessed entry via his personal badge, which had been flagged in order to alert law enforcement officials. At 5:42 a.m. Loewen attempted to use his badge twice on the card reader, and immediately thereafter Loewen was apprehended and taken into custody. Officials stressed that at no time was there any real danger and that Loewen was under constant surveillance.<sup>4</sup>

Loewen remains in custody on charges of attempting to use a weapon of mass destruction, attempting to damage property with explosives, and attempting to provide material support and resources, in the

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**The Heritage Foundation**  
214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE  
Washington, DC 20002  
(202) 546-4400 | [heritage.org](http://heritage.org)

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way of services to a foreign terrorist organization to include al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.

**Ongoing Threat of Islamist Terrorism and Radicalization in the U.S.** This case is an example of how Islamist terrorism and new age Islamist radicalization continues to threaten the safety and security of the U.S. Since 9/11, there have been at least 60 thwarted terrorist plots. In order to continue thwarting terrorist plots, Congress and the Obama Administration should:

- **Increase cooperative efforts among local law enforcement.** To aid future efforts, Congress and the President should properly apportion roles and responsibilities among federal, state, and local government. In order to clarify the domestic counterterrorism network, the President should also establish a national counterterrorism framework that clearly articulates how operations at all levels should function to combat terrorism while allowing law-abiding citizens to live freely.
- **Use successes such as the one in Wichita to establish proper methods for each state to interact with federal counterterrorism agents.** Washington should create training, dry runs, and interactive approaches that encourage state and local governments to maintain an active counterterrorism force.

- **Implement a strategy to counter Islamist terrorism.** As more and more terrorist threats and attacks formed from radicalization within the U.S. appear, Congress and the President should present a strategy to combat the ongoing threat. In August 2011, the U.S. government released a plan called “Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States,”<sup>5</sup> which outlines how federal agencies can assist and empower local officials, groups, and private organizations to prevent Islamist terrorism. Recommendations include strengthening law enforcement cooperation and helping communities understand how to protect themselves against and counter extremist propaganda (particularly online).<sup>6</sup> However, this plan lacks detail in delegating real responsibilities and resources. This is an issue that demands immediate attention from the executive branch in order to prevent this epidemic of Islamist radicalization and Islamist terrorism from spreading.

**An Evolving Threat.** The best way to protect the United States from terrorism is to ensure a strong and capable domestic counterterrorism enterprise—and to understand the continuing nature of the terror threat.<sup>7</sup>

The 61 thwarted attacks are all examples of why continued security, prevention, and intelligence regarding counterterrorism are so vital to the safety

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1. Roxana Hegeman, “Man Arrested in Car Bomb Plot at Kan. Airport,” ABC News, December 13, 2013, <http://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/man-arrested-car-bomb-plot-kan-airport-21210130> (accessed December 13, 2013).
  2. Associated Press, “Feds Foil Plot to Bomb Wichita Airport; Suspect in Custody,” *New York Post*, December 13, 2013, <http://nypost.com/2013/12/13/feds-foil-plot-to-bomb-wichita-airport-suspect-in-custody/> (accessed December 16, 2013).
  3. Pete Williams, “Feds Say They Disrupted Suicide Bomb Plot by Worker at Wichita Airport,” NBC News, [http://investigations.nbcnews.com/\\_news/2013/12/13/21891923-feds-say-they-disrupted-suicide-bomb-plot-by-worker-at-wichita-airport?lite](http://investigations.nbcnews.com/_news/2013/12/13/21891923-feds-say-they-disrupted-suicide-bomb-plot-by-worker-at-wichita-airport?lite) (accessed December 13, 2013).
  4. Ibid.
  5. Press release, “Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States,” the White House, August 3, 2011, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/08/03/empowering-local-partners-prevent-violent-extremism-united-states> (accessed January 2, 2013).
  6. Jessica Zuckerman, “54th Terror Plot Against the U.S.: Qazi Brothers’ Plot to Attack New York,” Heritage Foundation *Issue Brief* No. 3812, January 3, 2013, [http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2013/01/54th-terror-plot-against-the-us-qazi-brothers-plot?ac=1#\\_ftn1](http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2013/01/54th-terror-plot-against-the-us-qazi-brothers-plot?ac=1#_ftn1) (accessed December 13, 2013).
  7. Jessica Zuckerman, Steven P. Bucci, and James Jay Carafano, “60 Terrorist Plots Since 9/11: Continued Lessons in Domestic Counterterrorism,” Heritage Foundation *Special Report* No. 137, July 22, 2013, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2013/07/60-terrorist-plots-since-911-continued-lessons-in-domestic-counterterrorism>.

and prosperity of the U.S. and its citizens. This is yet another reminder to the U.S. government that counterterrorism strategies must continue to evolve in order to remain one step ahead of the enemy.

—*Cassandra Lucaccioni is Policy Analyst for the Western Hemisphere in the Douglas and Sarah Allison Center for Foreign Policy Studies, a department of the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for International Studies, at The Heritage Foundation.*