

**Analysis: Australia Prevents Terrorist Attack on Nuclear Reactor**  
Two Militant Islamic Terrorist Cells Disrupted; 17 Men Detained

**Summary**

- On November 8, 2005, the Australian Security Intelligence Organization (ASIO), New South Wales (NSW) Police and Victoria Police conducted raids in Melbourne and Sydney, disrupting terrorist cells planning to attack Australia's only nuclear reactor
- The investigation also uncovered plots to assassinate Prime Minister John Howard and his family, attack a train station and execute a large scale assault at a soccer game
- Suspects were procuring the ingredients necessary to engineer the explosive compounds Hexamethylene Triperoxide Diamine (HMTD) and Triacetone Triperoxide (TATP)
- Trained by al Qaeda, the two cells are associated with a sub-group of the Ahlus Sunnah wal-Jamaah Association, a Sunni Islamic group which follows a fundamentalist ideology



Officials report that a remote-controlled robot located a gun in a backpack worn by a suspect.



Reported Terrorist Cell Leader,  
Abdul Nacer Benbrika



Australian Law Enforcement  
Conducting Terrorist Raids

**Terrorist Tactics**

- The group has been planning the attacks for more than three years
- Several of the suspects received training from al Qaeda members and then were left to plan and execute attacks in Australia
- Cell members called for others, via emails and text messages, to join them in NSW for jihad against 'the enemies'; they also contacted other suspected terrorists currently under surveillance
- During searches following the arrests, police uncovered travel documents, computers, chemicals, ammunition, firearms, 165 railway detonators, machetes, samurai swords, digital timers and extremist Islamic literature
- Police uncovered bomb-making instructions in Arabic and videos entitled "*Sheikh Osama's Training Course*" and "*Are You Ready to Die?*"
- Cell members also ordered steel drums, batteries, plastic piping, circuit kits and stopwatches
- The suspects stockpiled chemicals used to make HMTD and TATP, and officials located instructions on how to make TATP in one suspect's home
- Khaled Sharrouf allegedly tried stealing six digital timers and 132 batteries from a Sydney store
- Police uncovered campsites in the Australian Outback where the suspects conducted training
- Suspects purchased casing for explosives, as well as the component materials for TATP, just 11 days prior to the arrests

- For a complete list of cell members see <http://intelligence-summit.blogspot.com/2005/11/australian-arrests.html>; for listing of items seized see <http://silentrunning.tv/?p=279>

### **Law Enforcement Response**

- Police monitored suspects for 16 months and accumulated over 240 hours of phone intercepts, outlining plots to assassinate the Prime Minister and perform other terrorist acts
- During the surveillance phase, police stopped three of the suspects near the Lucas Heights reactor
- The suspects' claim that they were trail biking was an obvious cover story, since the facility is surrounded by a 1.6 km wide buffer zone in the middle of a forest and police discovered that an outer gate had been cut
- Australia's recently passed anti-terror legislation aided officials in preventing these attacks
- The new legislation incorporates preventative detention and custody orders and expands the definition of planning a terrorist act. Suspects can also be held for 48 hours, placed under home curfews, face travel restrictions, and be monitored without charge for up to a year



Suspects were arrested in Sydney and Melbourne



Police uncovered chemicals and weapons during the searches



A suspect being arraigned in court

### **Background: Australia's History With Terrorism**

- There has never been a major attack on Australian soil during peacetime
- In November 2002 and October 2003, Osama bin Laden declared that Australia was a major target
- Australia is a staunch ally of the United States and has troops deployed in support of Coalition efforts in both Afghanistan and Iraq
- There are a growing number of terrorist cells operating in Australia. Followers of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, for example, have actively been attempting to recruit Australian Muslims
- Other Islamist terrorist organizations such as Jemaah Islamiyah (Indonesia), Abu Sayyaf and MILF (Philippines) present a clear threat to Australia and its regional partners
- The Lucas Heights nuclear reactor, located in a Sydney suburb, has previously been a terrorist target
- In 2000, New Zealand detectives discovered a terrorist plot to attack the Lucas Heights reactor, however, no arrests were made
- There is minimal uranium on-site as the reactor is a water-cooled research reactor, which does not generate power, but produces radioactive isotopes for medical devices

### **Profile of Cell Members**

- Spiritual leader of the cells, Abdul Nacer Benbrika, a.k.a. Abu Bakr, was born 1960 in Algeria, and is an outspoken supporter of Osama bin Laden

- The Islamic Council of Victoria claims Benbrika has no standing as a spiritual leader within the Muslim community in Australia
- Benbrika was associated with the Melbourne Religious Centre run by Sheikh Mohammed Omran, a Muslim cleric who leads a group called the Ahlus Sunnah wal Jamaah Association
- Authorities confiscated Benbrika's passport in March 2005 and raided his home in June
- All suspects are Muslim and either citizens or legal immigrants to Australia
- The 8 Sydney men are accused of conspiring to manufacture explosives in preparation for a terrorist act and of planning a 'catastrophic' act of terrorism
- The 10 Melbourne men are accused of being members of a terrorist organization
- Shane Kent, a 28 year old Australian-born Muslim convert, trained at the al Farooq terrorist camp in Afghanistan from June to August, 2001; he met bin Laden just months before September 11th
- At least two suspects had terrorist training in Pakistan. Amar Haddara possessed a letter that would have gained him access to a terrorist training camp



The Lucas Heights Nuclear Reactor  
Located Outside of Sydney, Australia



Aerial View of the Lucas Heights  
Nuclear Reactor

### **Implications for Law Enforcement**

- As it becomes more difficult to acquire and move the building blocks for WMD weapons internationally, terrorists will likely attempt to acquire such materials within the target country
- Case illustrates importance for law enforcement to develop and implement local non-proliferation strategies; for more information, see the Safe Cities publication from July 2005 on our website
- Islamist terror networks communicate globally, spreading tactics and reinforcing ideological concepts. As such, local law enforcement in major metropolitan areas must have a global perspective and build international partnerships
- Example of exemplary coordination between various police and intelligence organizations
- Police should closely monitor homegrown converts who adopt the Islamist ideology
- Al Qaeda and related groups are still training operatives in Pakistan
- Yet another use or attempted use of TATP, which has become the explosive of choice
- Benbrika reportedly said: "If they kill our kids, we kill little kids, innocent ones to send a message back to them." This violent demeanor is a hallmark of Islamist terrorists; local politicians must challenge such rhetoric and law enforcement should consider it among the precursors of terrorist acts

Christen Eddy provided this case study to CPT  
For more information please contact Tim Connors, at (212) 599-7000 or via e-mail:  
[tconnors@manhattan-institute.org](mailto:tconnors@manhattan-institute.org), or visit our website at [www.cpt-mi.org](http://www.cpt-mi.org).