

Analysis: Amman, Jordan, Suicide Bomb Attacks at Three Hotels
Terrorist group, al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia, claims responsibility

Summary

- Just before 9:00 PM, four Iraqi suicide bombers attack three hotels located in Amman: Grand Hyatt, Radisson SAS and Days Inn. The three attacks occur almost simultaneously
- Grand Hyatt: 23-year-old Rawad Jassem Mohammed detonated his explosive belt in the hotel lobby
- Days Inn: Remaining in a car, 23-year-old Safaa Mohammed Ali detonated his explosive belt after the car is stopped at a police checkpoint just outside of the hotel
- Radisson SAS: In the day's most deadly attack, 35 year-old Ali Hussein Ali al-Shamari detonated his explosive belt in the middle of a Jordanian-Palestinian wedding reception in the hotel's main ballroom. Shrapnel and ball bearings injured dozens and killed over 30. The bomber's wife, Sajida Mubarak Atrous al-Rishawi was unable to detonate her explosive belt and fled from the scene
- There were 63 fatalities, including American film producer Moustapha Akkad and his daughter, and over 100 people were wounded
- Hours after the attacks, al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia claimed responsibility via the internet
- This was the most deadly terrorist attack in Jordan's history; the majority of fatalities were Sunnis



Tactics

- Two men driving a white car picked up the bombers in Iraq. Using fake passports, the bombers entered Jordan and stayed in a rented apartment located in Tlaa' Ali
- The bombers told the landlady they were in Jordan for fertility treatments
- A female suicide bomber took part in the attacks
- Attacks carried out independently of Jordanian assistance. All preparation and material was organized in Iraq before the bombers entered Jordan
- Bombers took taxis to their respective target sites. They all wore 2 vests, one containing ball bearings, the other containing the explosive RDX
- Shamari's (the wedding bomber) vest contained 22 pounds of RDX
- There are reports that lights in sections of both the Radisson and Grand Hyatt hotels went out, just before the near-simultaneous blasts, in an apparently coordinated fashion

Law Enforcement Response

- Investigators followed leads on an internet posting in which al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia claimed responsibility for the attacks

- Internet leads and tips from a relative resulted in capture of female bomber in town of Salt. She confessed to her role on national television, demonstrating how the bomb was supposed to work



- Jordanian officials claim to have thwarted over 150 attacks by al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia; and since the beginning of the year, they have detained hundreds of Jordanian Islamists
- Jordan is drafting its first anti-terrorism legislation, referred to as the 'national agenda'. Jordan's government has defined security, public freedom and reform as among its top priorities
- Under this legislation, Jordanians must notify the government within 48 hours of a foreigner renting an apartment or house (a critical support requirement for these attacks), and the government has the power to hold terror suspects for questioning indefinitely
- The government announced a crackdown on the al-Qaeda recognized Takfiri philosophy, which condones killing Muslims who oppose their views



Jordanians protest hotel bombings

Abu Musab al-Zarqawi: Ideological Motivations and Recent Attacks

- Zarqawi originally appeared in Iraq following the US campaign in Afghanistan. In late 2004, Zarqawi helped form al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia, also referred to as al-Qaeda in Iraq
- Has superior knowledge of poisons and chemical weapons
- Has claimed responsibility for dozens of terrorist attacks, including infamous video tapes depicting the beheading of foreign hostages
- In August 2004, Jordanian forces disrupted a Zarqawi-organized plot to detonate 20 tons of toxic chemicals over Amman (see CPT case study)
- Other recent attacks include hotel car bombing in Egypt's Sharm el Sheik (July 2005) and a failed rocket attack against US Navy ships in Jordanian port of Aqaba (August 2005)
- Stated goals: topple pro-American Arab rulers, establish Islamic caliphate, attack Israel

- Born into a lower caste Jordanian tribe, Zarqawi holds a grudge against the nation's ruling elite
- Zarqawi spent five years in a Jordanian prison, and Jordan has sentenced him to death in absentia
- In the wake of the widespread rage against the bombings, Zarqawi released an audiotape justifying the attacks. He claimed that bombings were not aimed at Muslims, but at Israelis and Westerners. He threatened to behead King Abdullah II and promised new attacks. A transcript of Zarqawi's audiotape can be found at <http://www.globalterroralert.com/pdf/1105/zarqawi1105-7.pdf>
- Zarqawi is creating a terrorist network independent of any single nation. No known natives were involved in the attacks. All the materials necessary for the attacks, including the suicide belts and necessary support, were assembled outside of Jordan
- Zarqawi has organized an underground terrorist railway in Spain, Italy, Germany, Iraq and Syria
- Soft targets chosen in recent attacks instead of embassies and government buildings
- U.S. forces intercepted a letter from Ayman al-Zawahiri, Osama bin Laden's deputy, addressed to Zarqawi. The letter's contents warned that Zarqawi's arbitrary attacks on Shia were weakening support for al-Qaeda

Profile of the Female Suicide Bomber

- 35-year-old Sajida Mubarak Atrous al-Rishawi, was the wife of suicide bomber, Ali Hussein Ali al-Shamari. She is from Ramadi, Iraq
- During the attack, she encountered problems with her explosive belt and ran out of the Radisson SAS ballroom as her husband detonated his belt
- U.S. forces killed 3 of her brothers, one of whom was Zarqawi's lieutenant
- Arrested in an Al-Qaeda safe house in Salt after one of her relatives reported her whereabouts



Implications for Law Enforcement

- Use of female suicide bombers has become routine, including Westerners like Belgian Liliane Degauque. Terrorist tactics indicate a belief that women are less susceptible to security measures and more likely to increase the horror, and therefore media coverage, of an attack
- Bombers used taxis to enter target area; this tactic was also used in the Casablanca attacks in 2003 (see CPT case study). Police should consider briefing taxi drivers as part of an overall community outreach initiative
- In community policing programs designed to partner with Muslim communities in the US, police should emphasize that the victims of Islamist attacks are by and large Muslims, including American Moustapha Akaad (see http://www.usatoday.com/life/people/2005-11-11-akkad-obit_x.htm)

The Center for Policing Terrorism
www.cpt-mi.org

- Hotels are increasingly a favorite target, especially prominent American brand names
- Zarqawi is viewed as one of the greatest threats to peace in Iraq. He is also active beyond the region, extending his reach into Europe, and should be monitored as a potential threat to the US Homeland
- Jordanian officials report that investigators had been tracking the bombers in the days before the attack. This emphasizes the need for law enforcement to aggressively disrupt suspected terrorist cells, using all the weapons permitted by law, before these cells attack
- Local counter terrorism tactics must focus on the crimes of document fraud and human smuggling—both necessary precursors to this and other attacks
- In multiple attack scenarios, response measures based on near real time communication with private partners, coupled with planned and rehearsed immediate action drills, can disrupt those parts of an overall attack plan that are not executed in close proximity to the time of the initial attack

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