

ISSUE BRIEF

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Chicago Bombing Attempt Marks 52 Terrorist Plots Since 9/11

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Last Friday, the FBI arrested 18-year-old American citizen Adel Daoud in a plot to detonate a car bomb outside a local Chicago bar. Daoud, who was active in online Jihadi forums and vocal in his desire to commit violent jihad, considered 29 possible targets before settling on the Chicago bar.

Thankfully, the car bomb had been deactivated by the FBI and the public was never in danger. This most recent plot marks the 52nd publicly known, Islamist-inspired terrorist plot since 9/11 and illustrates the continued threat of homegrown terrorism within the United States.

The Daoud Plot. According to the FBI affidavit, Adel Daoud began to gather information and communicate his desire for “engaging in violent jihad, either in the United States or overseas” in October 2011. Surveillance allegedly showed

that Daoud maintained a presence in Jihadi Internet forums, where he sought advice on how to kill Americans in “accordance of the Quran.” His communications assert his belief that Americans were “legal targets of attack” because most Americans have given their moral support to war “with Islam and Muslims” and pay taxes to fund that war.¹

Over the course of nearly a year, Daoud gathered information and inspiration from al-Qaeda’s *Inspire* magazine and other online sources, sought to recruit others to perpetrate acts of terrorism, and discussed potential U.S. plots. Sources indicate that Daoud considered a list of 29 potential targets, including military recruiting centers, shopping malls, movie theaters, tourist attractions, and concert venues, before selecting a local Chicago bar as his target.

In May, undercover FBI agents began to reach out to Daoud online. Feigning a desire to assist in the terrorist plot, the agents supplied Daoud with an inactive car bomb placed inside a Jeep Cherokee. On the night of September 14, Daoud drove the vehicle to the Chicago bar and parked it outside. He then exited the Jeep and attempted to detonate the bomb from approximately a block

away. He was immediately taken into custody by the FBI.

Though apparently unconnected, this plot comes as the federal government has warned of the potential for violent protests and a heightened terrorist threat in light of the release of a reported film that insults the Prophet Mohammad, including related protests in the Middle East.

Continued Threat of Homegrown Extremism. With the bombing attempt by Adel Daoud, at least 52 publicly known, Islamist-inspired terrorist plots have been thwarted since 9/11. The fact that the U.S. has not seen another large-scale attack since September 11, 2001, truly speaks to the nation’s success in combating the continued threat of terrorism.

Internationally, terrorist networks have been dismantled, training camps dispersed, and the terrorist leadership largely decimated. The global environment has become an increasingly hostile one for terrorist networks, while U.S. efforts to halt terrorist travel have strengthened and grown. Together, these facts have given homegrown terrorism greater appeal for al-Qaeda and other terrorist networks.

With this most recent plot, at least 43 of the 52 thwarted terrorist plots

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could be considered homegrown—planned by American citizens, legal permanent residents, or visitors radicalized predominately in the U.S.²

Remaining Vigilant. This latest attempt proves that the threat of terrorism remains real and that the U.S. cannot afford to let down its guard. In order to counter the continued threat of homegrown terrorism and violent extremism, the U.S. should:

- **Maintain essential counterterrorism tools.** Support for important investigative tools such as the PATRIOT Act and the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) is essential to maintaining the security of the U.S. and combating terrorist threats. FISA authorizes electronic surveillance within certain legal limits, while key provisions of the PATRIOT act—such as the roving surveillance authority and business records provision—have proven essential in thwarting terrorist plots. Yet these resources require reauthorization every year.

In order to ensure that law enforcement and intelligence authorities have the critical counterterrorism tools they need, Congress should seek permanent authorization of the three sunset provisions within the PATRIOT act. At the same time, Congress should

ensure that it does not deny the intelligence community the vital tools contained within FISA and the subsequent FISA Amendments Act, which is set to expire at the end of this year.

- **Fully implement a strategy to counter violent extremism.** Countering violent extremism is an important complement to an effective counterterrorism strategy. This August, the U.S. government released a plan called “Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States.”³ The strategy focuses on outlining how federal agencies can assist and empower local officials, groups, and private organizations to prevent violent extremism. It includes strengthening law enforcement cooperation and helping communities understand how to counter and protect themselves against extremist propaganda (particularly online).

Unfortunately, this plan is not a true strategy. It fails to assign responsibilities and direct action and resource investments. More should be done to transform a laundry list of good ideas into an effective program to support communities in protecting and strengthening civil society.

- **Ensure a proactive approach to halting terrorism.** Despite the persistent threat of terrorism, the Obama Administration continues to focus on reactive policies and prosecuting terrorists rather than on proactive efforts to enhance intelligence tools and thwart terrorist attempts. This strategy fails to recognize the true nature of the threat posed by terrorist groups—such as al-Qaeda—and homegrown extremism. The Administration, and the nation as a whole, should continue to keep in place a robust, enduring, and proactive counterterrorism framework in order to identify and thwart terrorist threats long before the public is in danger.

Continuing Security. As the 11th anniversary of 9/11 has just passed, this plot should remind the U.S. that the dangers of terrorism are real. Our homeland security enterprise needs a true counter-extremist strategy and continued access to essential tools.

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1. *U.S. v. Daoud* (D.N.Ill. E.D., September 15, 2012) (Criminal Complaint), <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/chi-read-the-entire-criminal-complaint-against-daoud-20120915,0,5492896.htmlpage> (accessed September 17, 2012).

2. For purposes of this report, the Congressional Research Service’s definition of homegrown terrorism is employed: “[H]omegrown’ and ‘domestic’ [terrorism] are terms that describe terrorist activity or plots perpetrated within the United States or abroad by American citizens, legal permanent residents, or visitors radicalized largely within the United States.” See Jerome P. Bjelopera, “American Jihadist Terrorism: Combating a Complex Threat,” Congressional Research Service *Report for Congress*, updated November 15, 2011, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/terror/R41416.pdf> (accessed September 17, 2012). All plots discussed in this report, however, involved targets in the United States. For more information on international terrorist plots, see David Muhlhausen and Jena Baker McNeill, “Terror Trends: 40 Years’ Data on International and Domestic Terrorism,” Heritage Foundation *Special Report* No. 93, May 20, 2011, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2011/05/terror-trends-40-years-data-on-international-and-domestic-terrorism>. A plot was designated as homegrown if one or more of the actors met the above definition.

3. 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 September 15, 2012).