

Analysis: Jordan Claims Major al Qaeda Plot Disrupted

Attacks Designed to Unleash Chemical Cloud in Capital City of Amman

Summary

- Four simultaneous attacks using conventional and chemical weapons planned for Amman
- U.S. Embassy, Jordanian General Intelligence Directorate (GID), Prime Minister's office, and military bases in Amman targeted
- Plot within days of being carried out when security forces acted on 20 April
- In confessions on Jordanian television, suspects claim Abu Masab al-Zarqawi planned attacks
- Jordanian television reported that 80,000 people would have been killed, 60,000 more than first reported. Estimate is not a scientific one but rather illustrates the magnitude of the attack
- Jordanian officials captured 20 tons of chemicals, much of it sulfuric acid, numerous explosives, and 3 trucks, some of which were equipped with modified plows
- Some of the chemicals and explosives originated in Syria, though Jordan's King Abdullah stated that they were not of Syrian government origin
- EU WMD experts brought in to examine the chemicals
- Azmi Jayyousi and Zarqawi planned attacks in January 2004 in Iraq
- Jayyousi may have set up chemical factory in northern Jordan (Irbid), near the Syrian border
- Suleiman Darwish, a Zarqawi aid in Syria provided Jayyousi with \$170,000, along with forged banknotes and passports

Local Response

- Multiple raids conducted on 20 April, Jordanian officials captured cell leader Azmi Jayyousi and killed 4 others including Jordanian al Qaeda leader, Mowaffal Ali Adwan
- Both Jayyousi and Adwan are affiliated with Zarqawi
- Jayyousi "pledge[d] allegiance to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, to obey him without any questioning"
- Jordanian authorities also captured the trucks, explosives and chemicals to be used in the attack
- Hussein Sharif, recruited by Jayyousi to modify trucks and carry out one of the attacks
- Several of those arrested had last name of Al-Sishani, a Chechen name
- Chechen enclave in Amman originated after one of Stalin's purges
- GID closed down the Arab Caucasian Studies Research Center in Amman, which may have played a logistical role in the plot



This image grab from the official Jordanian TV shows one of the workshops where members of a terrorist cell in Jordan were preparing 'chemicals that terrorists from Al-Qaeda were trying to make explosives with', according to a taped testimony aired by the official television station.(AFP/JORDANIAN TV)

Tactics

- Four attacks, conventional and chemical devices, massive explosions and a toxic cloud envisioned
- Conventional attacks against the GID HQ and military bases using car bombs and modified trucks to crash through security barriers
- Chemical attack aimed at U.S. Embassy and Prime Minister's office
- Initial attacks designed to cause massive chaos, facilitating access to other government targets

Device

- Multiple devices consisting of conventional and chemical bombs
- Conventional weapons consisted of a truck filled with 20 tons of explosives
- Chemical devices consist of 71 toxins, including blister and choking agents and nerve gas
- Jordanian officials claim the mix intended to form poisonous cloud which would spread for miles
- U.S. officials are skeptical regarding the poisonous cloud, but admit that devices were very lethal

Implications for New York

- Plot confirms reports that al Qaeda has greater WMD capability than previously thought
- Al Qaeda WMD training camps last known to be in the Pankisi Gorge under the auspices of chief scientist Midhat Mursi
- Al Qaeda establishes WMD operatives in target country to avoid risks of smuggling ingredients
- Attack demonstrates that WMD may be combined with conventional attacks
- No single antidote available for weapon containing burning, nerve and choking agents
- Large scale attacks financed for only \$170,000
- Targeted buildings were within ½ mile of each other



Azmi Jayyousi



Hussein Sharif

Zarqawi and Jordan

- Arrested by Jordanian authorities in early 90's for planning attack on U.S. Embassy in Amman
- Since then, Zarqawi has wanted to destroy Jordan's ruling family
- Ties with al Qaeda in Afghanistan
- Accused of murdering Laurence Foley, American aid official shot outside his home in Amman
- Member of large Bani Hassan tribe, located in Al Salt and Az Zarqa, Zarqawi's hometown
- Many tribesmen implicated in Millenium Plot to blow up hotels in Amman

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