



School Safety Newsletter

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A Narrowly Averted Tragedy in Minnesota

Stratfor Global Intelligence - <http://us4.campaign-archive2.com/?u=74786417f9554984d314d06bd&id=8d3439168f&e=f9b72bfaaf>

May 8, 2014—By Scott Stewart

The Waseca Police Department in Minnesota announced May 1 that it had disrupted a local high school student's plot to murder his family and then commit a Columbine-inspired bomb and firearms attack at his school. The department said a concerned citizen called the evening of April 29 and reported seeing a man with a backpack break into a self-storage locker and close the door behind him. Police responding to the call found 17-year-old John LaDue in the storage locker. Noting the presence of gunpowder, pyrotechnic chemicals, a pressure cooker, steel ball bearings and other items used in bombmaking inside the locker, the officers secured the storage space and transported LaDue to the police department for a voluntary interview.

LaDue told officers that he had planned to kill his family, start diversionary fires in a rural part of Waseca to distract first responders, and then travel to his school, where he planned to detonate several explosive devices and shoot the school resource officer, staff and students. LaDue also told officers he had hoped police officers responding to the scene would kill him.

Based on the officers' observations and the interview of LaDue, police obtained search warrants for the storage locker and LaDue's home. They found a document outlining LaDue's plans in minute detail that indicated the plot had been in the works for some 10 months. They also found multiple firearms, including an SKS rifle and a Beretta pistol, several hundred rounds of ammunition and three completed explosive devices. LaDue had apparently intended to conduct the attack on April 20, the anniversary of the 1999 school shooting in Columbine, Colo., but postponed the assault when he realized April 20 fell on a Sunday this year.

LaDue's plot was thwarted, but it highlights several concepts Stratfor has discussed for many years concerning such attacks and specifically how they can be prevented.

Attacks Follow a Process

The LaDue case is another demonstration that an attack does not "just happen." Rather, it is the result of a distinct and discernible planning cycle that anyone wanting to conduct an attack must follow.

There are several points in the process in which an aspiring attacker has no choice but to make himself vulnerable to detection. One such point is while conducting preoperational surveillance. Another is during the weapons acquisition phase. There have been numerous cases in which would-be attackers have unwittingly reached out to government agents or informants in an effort

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A Narrowly Averted Tragedy in Minnesota (Continued)

to gather weapons or explosive devices for an attack. This is true for attackers of many ideologies: jihadists, neo-Nazis, anti-government militia members, anarchists and militant environmentalists.

The success of these sting cases has led jihadist leaders from al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and the al Qaeda core since 2009 to encourage grassroots attackers to conduct simple attacks within their capabilities. Right- and left-wing militant ideologues have issued similar calls for their adherents to conduct attacks alone or in small "phantom" cells.

Even when an aspiring attacker opts for a simple strike, obtaining the components to construct even a basic explosive device such as a pressure cooker bomb has led to the arrest of some plotters. Often they attract attention by their demeanor while acquiring necessary items. In July 2011, for example, Pfc. Jason Abdo was arrested in a Killeen, Texas, hotel after a gun store employee told police that Abdo had acted suspiciously while purchasing a large quantity of smokeless powder. Abdo was planning to bomb a Killeen restaurant that soldiers frequented.

In the LaDue case, it was his demeanor at the storage facility that led to the phone call to police. In an interview with the Minneapolis Star Tribune, the witness noted that she called police because she sensed something was wrong in the way he arrived at the storage space by sneaking through her backyard instead of coming in on the road. LaDue also took some time to get into the locker, leading the witness to believe he may have broken into it, and then shut the door behind him. This is obviously not normal behavior for someone visiting a self-storage site.

Bombmaker Clues

In actuality, LaDue's behavior at the storage locker was not the first clue Waseca police had that something was afoot. While planning the attack, LaDue had experimented with his improvised explosive device components and had detonated smaller devices in parks, the high school athletic field and church and elementary school playgrounds. Police had opened an investigation into the remains of some CO2 cartridge bombs found on the playground at the Hartley Elementary School in Waseca in March. It is unclear from published reports if LaDue planned to use the CO2 cartridges filled with gunpowder as improvised detonators for his pressure cooker bombs or if he intended to use them as improvised hand grenades. Either way, the remnants of the explosive devices were evidence that someone was engaged in bombmaking.

Bombmakers frequently test improvised explosive mixtures and bomb components such as blasting caps to ensure that they are functioning properly and that the completed device will therefore be viable. Testing usually involves burning or detonating small quantities of the explosive mixture, or actually exploding the improvised blasting cap or a prototype explosive device. The bombmaker will often attempt to do this in a remote place so as not to draw attention to his activities. LaDue was not so discreet with his explosives tests.

The problem for police with an item such as CO2 canisters filled with black powder is that it is difficult to determine whether the items are intended for use in an attack or if they are merely being used by someone recreationally. It is not uncommon for some people to experiment with small bombs, as a YouTube search of "homemade bomb" will readily attest. But a rash of seemingly "harmless" bomb incidents, as was seen in the LaDue case, could indicate that someone is preparing for an attack and therefore presents police with an opportunity to thwart the attack if they can identify the person doing the bomb testing.

Grassroots Defenders

As we've previously noted, the number of dedicated counterterrorism practitioners is very limited. As a result, attackers, who are forced to reveal themselves during the attack planning cycle, are far more likely to be spotted by someone other than an FBI or MI5 agent. This fact highlights the importance of what we call grassroots defenders -- citizens practicing situational awareness who notice and report indicators of a pending attack, such as weapons acquisition, bombmaking and the conduct of preoperational surveillance.

Monthly Webinars!

First Wednesday of
Every Month at 10
am.

Next Webinar - June 4, 2014

There will be no
Webinar in July

Each webinar has a
round table discussion at
the end. Questions are
always welcome!

To participate, you must be a
vetted member. For more
information please email
schoolsafety@isp.state.il.us

A Narrowly Averted Tragedy in Minnesota (Continued)

Grassroots defenders are not vigilantes, and this is not a call to institute the type of paranoid informant network that existed in East Germany. Rather, grassroots defenders are citizens who take responsibility for their own security and for the security of society and who report possible terrorist behavior to authorities. Anyone can spot operational planning activities such as purchasing bombmaking components and firearms, creating or testing improvised explosive mixtures and conducting preoperational surveillance.

The LaDue case was further proof that ordinary citizens exercising good situational awareness can save and have saved lives. This has been the driving force behind programs such as the New York Police Department's "If You See Something, Say Something" campaign, a program subsequently adopted by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security as a means of encouraging citizens to report potential terrorist behavior.

It is unrealistic to expect the government to uncover and thwart every plot. There are simply too many potential malevolent actors and too many vulnerable targets. People need to assume responsibility for their own security and the security of their communities. This doesn't mean living in fear and paranoia but rather being cognizant of potential dangers and alert to indicators of them.

Picture Worth a Thousand Words: Lockdown Enhancements

School Active Shooter Drill Practices Barricading a Door



<http://m.mccookgazette.com/story/1961445.html>

April 13, 2013

Wichita - McCook Jr. High School students huddle against a wall after barricading their classroom door during an "active killer response" drill Thursday afternoon. The drill was part of a media day event attended by the McCook Daily Gazette, local radio station representatives and a news crew from KWCH TV of Wichita, Kansas.



Mia Langheim
School Intelligence Officer

Counterterrorism Chief: Parents Should Watch For ‘Sudden Personality Changes’ In Children

<http://washington.cbslocal.com/2014/04/18/counterterrorism-chief-parents-should-watch-for-sudden-personality-changes-in-children/>

April 18, 2014

Delivering a speech at Harvard University’s John F. Kennedy School of Government on Tuesday, White House Homeland Security and Counterterrorism Adviser Lisa Monaco said that local communities have to be aware of terrorist threats where the government cannot, noting that parents should watch for “sudden personality changes in their children at home.”

In the speech at the Harvard Kennedy School Forum entitled, “Countering Violent Extremism and the Power of Community,” Monaco made mention of the Boston Marathon bombings anniversary and the Kansas shootings at Jewish community complexes.

“President Obama has been laser-focused on making sure we use all the elements of our national power to protect Americans, including developing the first government-wide strategy to prevent violent extremism in the United States,” said Monaco, in a transcript made available by the White House. “At the same time, we recognize that there are limits to what the federal government can do.”

Monaco continued, saying that local communities have to share some responsibility in awareness of possible terrorist threats within the U.S.

“Local communities are the most powerful asset we have in the struggle against violence and violent extremism,” said Monaco. “We’ve crunched the data on this. In the more than 80 percent of cases involving homegrown violent extremists, people in the community—whether peers or family members or authority figures or even strangers—had observed warning signs a person was becoming radicalized to violence.”

Monaco said that many of these warning signs are ignored, and that local communities and parents should be more wary of problems developing domestically. She listed a series of behaviors that may indicate a growing threat.

“Parents might see sudden personality changes in their children at home—becoming confrontational. Religious leaders might notice unexpected clashes over ideological differences. Teachers might hear a student expressing an interest in traveling to a conflict zone overseas. Or friends might notice a new interest in watching or sharing violent material.”

“The government is rarely in position to observe these early signals, so we need to do more to help communities understand the warning signs, and then work together to intervene before an incident can occur.”

Monaco said that in addition to citizen alertness, the Department of Homeland Security is increasing its partnerships across the country and making hundreds of millions of dollars in grant money available annually to local law enforcement to help improve anti-terrorism security at the municipal and county level.

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