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NEWSLETTER



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Open Source News reporting Summary: This collection of open source information is offered for informational purposes only. It is not, and should not be, construed as official evaluated intelligence.

Online data a gold mine for terrorists



The widespread availability of sensitive information on corporate Web sites appears to have been largely overlooked by IT and security managers responding this week to the Department of Homeland Security's warning of a heightened terrorist threat against the financial services sector. Freely available on the Web, for example, are 3-D models of the exterior and limited portions of the interior of the Citigroup Inc. headquarters building in Manhattan -- one of the sites specifically named in the latest terror advisory issued by the DHS. Likewise, details of the Citigroup building's history of structural design weaknesses, including its susceptibility to toppling over in high winds, the construction of its central support column and the fire rating of the materials used in the building, are readily available on the Web

Full story:

<http://www.computerworld.com/securitytopics/security/story/0,10801,95098,00.html?SKC=home95098>

ANALYSIS:

The renewed debate over online data follows reports that the recent capture of al Qaeda computer expert Muhammad Naeem Noor Khan in Pakistan yielded photographs and floor diagrams of specific buildings in the U.S. that terrorists may have been planning to attack; however, security experts have long warned against placing sensitive information online. According to MacDonnell Ulsch, managing director of Janus Risk Management Inc., providing this type of information "may make it easier for contractors and service providers to do their jobs," but he added it was "a fundamental mistake with deadly consequences." The 9 August article emphasized that the availability of potentially useful information to terrorists reaches well beyond Citigroup Inc., noting that the Chicago Board of Trade's website includes photographs of the facility's underground parking garages, floor plans of office suites, and contact names and phone numbers for the telecommunications service providers that serve the building. Although corporations have had varying degrees of success in developing cybersecurity by "tuning a firewall, changing parameters on antivirus software, and advocating more frequent password changes," Yoran noted a lack of focus on blocking cybersurveillance activities and speculated that DHS may look into publishing best-practices guidelines for companies to follow. DHS spokeswoman Michelle Petrovich said that, while companies have the right to post whatever information they want, DHS encourages all companies to add website reviews to their list of preventive security measures.

It's not so much *what folks don't know* that's the problem.
It's that *they know too much... that ain't so ...* that's the problem !

How big Al Qaeda's footprint is in the US

Intelligence revelations this week suggest that operatives remain active here, though the number of cells is uncertain.

Anyone who can tell you how many terror cells are operating in the United States can also tell you how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. Or so says a former CIA operative. But he and other intelligence experts say it's all but necessary to assume terror cells are here. And several revelations this week suggest that far more than prudence is at play. New reports indicate that an Al Qaeda operative captured in Pakistan had contacted people in the US as recently as this year. The renewed concern about Al Qaeda's footprint in the US has coincided with several developments overseas. Security was tightened at Rome's main airport following threats directed at Italy. Pakistan, meanwhile, continued with a crackdown on Islamic militancy, and a dozen Al Qaeda suspects were arrested in Britain. In all, the developments show an even stronger emphasis on tracking down Al Qaeda. But in the US, the challenge of identifying and finding individuals in sleeper cells can be daunting: Unlike many of the spies and moles of the cold-war days that frequented the cocktail circuit in Washington, Al Qaeda operatives in everyday America specialize in blending in there. Because of the cell structure of the organization - think of it as bubble wrap with no individual cell even knowing which others exist - it's clear how difficult gathering intelligence against this enemy is.

Full story: <http://www.csmonitor.com/2004/0806/p02s01-usgn.html?s=ent>

Al Qaeda operatives captured by CIA provided intelligence behind new orange heightened terrorist threat alert

Senior US counterterrorist and intelligence officials in Washington told Homeland Security Today Magazine in recent days intelligence gleaned as a consequence of the arrest in Texas of alleged Al Qaeda courier Farida Goolam Mohamed Ahmed, and the subsequent unreported capture by the CIA of two operatives of an Al Qaeda cell operating in Mexico for which she was ferrying "instructions" to suspected Al Qaeda members in New York, contributed significantly to the nation's capital, New York City and New Jersey being put on high alert Sunday.

Full story: <http://www.prweb.com/releases/2004/8/prweb147272.htm>

Related reporting:

U.S. warns of al-Qaida from South Africa Inspectors on high alert for operatives using nation's passports

http://www.worldnetdaily.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=39853

Mexican police arrest SA terror suspect

http://www.iol.co.za/index.php?set_id=1&click_id=22&art_id=vn20040805113252827C294710

Arab Bank's NY Branch violated Anti-Terrorism Act, channeled money to terrorists from Holy Land Foundation, other illicit charities

The Arab Bank through its Madison Avenue branch in Manhattan channeled hundreds of thousands of dollars from the Holy Land Foundation and others to terrorists, according to a lawsuit filed by families of American terror victims killed and injured in Palestinian terror attacks. The Arab Bank launders Saudi payments to the families of suicide bombers and other funds intended for Palestinian terrorist groups and converts them into dollars at its Madison Avenue branch, the lawsuit alleges. The funds are then re-routed to local branches of Arab Bank in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and paid out to the personal accounts of hundreds of terrorists and their families as well as Hamas front organizations and other Palestinian terrorists groups, according to the amended complaint. Mark Werbner, the lead counsel for the victims, says the suit will not end terrorism, but he adds: "America can't allow a New York banking institution to launder money for terrorists. Every financial institution has certain obligations under the Anti-Terrorism Act and the Patriot Act to insure that they are not used a conduit for funding terrorists."

Full story: <http://releases.usnewswire.com/GetRelease.asp?id=109-08102004>

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The Other War on Terror

Four ways we must protect the nation's electronic frontier.

America is in the thick of a protracted war, and it has nothing to do with the Middle East. Call it the War on Cyberterror. nation's struggle to secure its electronic borders began with the Marsh Commission, established by President Clinton in 1996 after the Oklahoma City bombing of a federal office building. Back then the goal was "critical infrastructure protection" - sheltering vital assets from, as former national cybersecurity adviser Richard Clarke chillingly put it, an "electronic Pearl Harbor." , there has been no electro-catastrophe. But modern mayhem has two faces: swift sneak attack and slow-gathering chaos. We may have dodged the computer equivalent of 9/11, but we're becoming mired in a digital Mogadishu. The threat isn't only from rogue nations and stateless terrorists bent on storming the citadels of power. A loathsome tide of scammers, spammers, phishers, and ID thieves is attacking the populace wholesale.

Full story: <http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/12.08/view.html?pg=4>

Security: What companies need to do

While financial firms have boosted protection greatly, many others have not. But more safety doesn't have to cost a bundle.

Some "keep betting that it's not going to happen" to them, says former New York Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani But even as Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge warns of heightened risk of a preelection terror attack, businesses in other major cities are taking more of a cost-benefit approach -- and deciding that the safeguards they've added since September 11 will meet the risks they're likely to face. Nearly 40% of the top executives of 96 midsize companies recently surveyed by the Conference Board agreed that "security is an expense that ought to be minimized." The Conference Board study found that 45% of the companies reported spending no more on security than before September 11.

Full story: <http://msnbc.msn.com/id/5612622/>

Al Qaeda plans to target merchant shipping

Intelligence shows al Qaeda has plans to target merchant shipping in a bid to disrupt world trade, Britain's top navy officer says. "We have got an underlying level of intelligence which shows there is a threat," the Royal Navy's First Sea Lord and Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Sir Alan West, was quoted as saying by Lloyd's List maritime newspaper on Thursday.

Full story:

<http://www.reuters.co.uk/newsPackageArticle.jhtml?type=topNews&storyID=560171§ion=news>

British terror suspect had plans to attack Gulf ships, says US

A British citizen facing extradition to the United States on terrorism charges was found in possession of three-year-old plans to attack US Navy ships in the Gulf, a US lawyer said. "The documents went on to describe the battle group's vulnerability to a terrorist attack and provided specific examples of how the ships might be attacked," US lawyer Rosemary Fernandes told a central London court Friday. His court appearance came as 12 other terrorism suspects, collared on Tuesday in one of the biggest anti-terrorist operations in Britain since the September 11 attacks in the United States in 2001, were being kept in police custody for questioning. One of the 12 was identified to AFP by Pakistani intelligence officials as Abu Eisa Al-Hindi, accused by both Islamabad and Washington of being a senior Al-Qaeda figure.

Full story: http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/afp_world/view/99614/1.html

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Thailand may join patrols of Malacca Strait



Thailand will join Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore in conducting coordinated patrols of the Malacca Strait, in a bid to fight piracy and terrorism, Indonesia's military chief, General Endriartono Sutarto, has said. "Last week, we expanded with Thailand to conduct coordinated patrols. We are still open to other countries outside the current four if they want to offer assistance,"

Full story:

<http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/southeastasia/view/99602/1/.html>

ANALYSIS:

The threat of maritime terrorist attacks has long troubled security officials. Though most maritime threats have not been realized, two attacks have brought into focus potential modes of attack and possible vulnerabilities. In 2001, al Qaeda drove a small, fleet boat packed with explosives into the hull of the U.S.S. Cole, which was then docked in the Yemeni port city of Aden. The most recent incident involved the 2002 attack on a French oil tanker, also off the coast of Yemen, using similar tactics. The tactics used by terrorist groups prompted naval fleets, West said, to develop new strategies and techniques that focused on the ability of warships to respond to close-range contact with small, fast craft (*Lloyd's List*). Perhaps the most pressing issue facing maritime security -- aside from ports -- is how to defend against attacks at choke points, where authorities see the gravest vulnerabilities. Many of the world's straits experience considerable daily traffic over vast swaths of water. Although a military presence would considerably increase security in these areas, threats are still likely to prove difficult to address. Given the sheer quantity and diversity of craft that maneuver through the straits daily, attack vessels -- potentially small and unassuming -- pose a significant challenge for security forces. U.S. authorities believed al Qaeda and other organizations, such as Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), were targeting vessels in the Straits of Malacca. In 2003, Singaporean officials warned of intelligence threats suggesting JI intended on either hijacking a vessel and blowing it up in the Straits or steering the vessel into the port itself. The report provoked new concerns over the area's security and prompted U.S. officials to propose American naval security for the region; that idea got a cool reception, and the area is now patrolled by local authorities from Malaysia, Singapore, and others. Naval fleets from various nations also patrol key entry points at the Suez and Panama canals and the Straits of Gibraltar.

Increased security in Manila

Philippine security forces increased security in metropolitan Manila Aug. 5 in response to general terrorist warnings. Military Chief of Staff Narciso Abaya said that while there are no new reports of possible attacks by Al-Qaeda or other terrorist organizations in Manila, the military is still increasing the number of patrols in the Makati business district and in crowded areas such as malls and bus stations.

COMMENT:

The latest measures are likely intended as a signal to the population and foreign investors that security forces are prepared to counter the terrorist threat in the country. Such moves are aimed at ensuring political and economic stability.

Suspect in Britain had details of U.S. fleet Court papers also say he worked with 9/11 mastermind

A computer specialist arrested this week in Britain possessed the classified routes of a U.S. naval battle group based in San Diego and is part of an al Qaeda network linked to Sept. 11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed that authorities on three continents have been working to dismantle in recent weeks, according to court documents released Friday and U.S. officials. Babar Ahmad, who possessed 3-year-old documents detailing the routes and vulnerabilities of a fleet that included the aircraft carrier Constellation and the destroyer Benfold, which was then operating in the Strait of Hormuz, is the cousin of Muhammad Naem Noor Khan, a key figure in the recent arrests of alleged terrorist plotters, U.S. intelligence officials said.

Full story: <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/c/a/2004/08/07/MNGUJ84H2G1.DTL>

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Qaeda strategy is called cause for new alarm

They scouted the streets. They took photographs. They wrote detailed surveillance reports. And then, after five years of patiently waiting, Al Qaeda operatives carried out the devastating suicide truck bombing at the American Embassy in Nairobi, Kenya, in August 1998, killing more than 200 people and injuring thousands. This meticulous approach to terrorism - studying targets and fine-tuning strategies for years before an attack - is in part why officials in Washington say they are so alarmed about the latest evidence of reconnaissance of financial centers in New York, New Jersey and Washington, even though much of the information dates back to the days before Sept. 11, 2001.

Full story:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/08/05/politics/05plots.html?th=&adxnnl=2&adxnnlx=1091715944-FJK+2vfBgklxKOrHAIvdrw>

Senior Al-Qaeda terrorist arrested in U.K.

Police in London announced Aug. 4 that they apprehended the "head of Al-Qaeda operations in Britain." Abu Eisa Al-Hindi (also Abu Musa Al-Hindi) was allegedly planning an attack on London's Heathrow International Airport. London Metropolitan Police carried out the raid that led to Al-Hindi's arrest on Aug. 3, but refused to comment on the arrest.

COMMENT:

The apprehension of Al-Hindi is believed to have been carried out, at least in part, based on intelligence gleaned by Pakistani intelligence following the interrogation of an Al-Qaeda operative in Lahore. While yet unconfirmed, several media outlets reported that plans for an attack on London's Heathrow Airport were found on the computer of Al-Qaeda computer expert, Naeem Noor Khan. These same reports indicated that Al-Hindi was in charge of executing the Heathrow attack. One of the 13 men rounded up in the U.K. terror sweep has been released; counterterrorism experts continue interrogations of the remaining 12. Authorities can hold the men for questioning for up to two weeks without charge.

Related reporting:

Pakistan intelligence may be driving arrests

<http://www.cnn.com/2004/WORLD/asiapcf/08/05/terror.wrap/index.html>

The hunt is on for alleged al-Qaeda recruiter

Disclosures of al-Qaeda targets in South Africa involving two alleged South African terrorists have turned attention on their mystery recruiter, named as Ahmed, somewhere in South Africa. Security sources in Islamabad said the South Africans arrested after a Pakistan shootout, Zoubair Ismail and Feroze Abubakar Ganchi, both from Gauteng, were apparently initiated into the Osama bin Laden jihad by this "teacher". Emerging from the latest arrests, key landmarks in Johannesburg, Pretoria and Cape Town have been identified as targets of a huge al-Qaeda terror blitz on South Africa.

Full story: http://www.iol.co.za/index.php?set_id=1&click_id=15&art_id=vn20040804101532571C684910

Mayor killed in southern Colombia

Authorities reported Aug. 10 that the mayor of town of Rivera, in the southern department of Huila, was assassinated. The mayor was apparently shot several times by two men while he was entering his house late Aug. 9.

COMMENT:

It is not clear yet who is behind the assassination, but illegal armed groups are likely responsible for the attack. Politicians are favorite targets of the guerrilla and paramilitary groups in Colombia, especially in rural areas such as Huila. The FARC guerrillas control many remote areas in southern Colombia. During the campaign for regional elections last October the FARC also ordered the assassination of all candidates who did not reach a prior agreement with the armed group. As many as 160 candidates withdrew from the regional elections.

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Debate over al-Qaeda's connection to West Africa's diamond trade takes new turns

The arrest of a Tanzanian fugitive in Pakistan last week, release of the 9-11 Commission report in Washington and a forthcoming finding by a war crimes tribunal in Sierra Leone have rekindled the debate over what role, if any, west African diamonds played in financing the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States. Ahmed Khalfan Ghailani, a Tanzanian accused of masterminding the 1998 bombings of American embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, who was arrested by Pakistan security forces along with more than a dozen other al Qaeda suspects, has been identified as a linchpin of an al Qaeda diamond trading operation in Liberia and neighboring Sierra Leone. Washington Post correspondent Douglas Farah, in a recently published 225-page book entitled "Blood from Stones: The Secret Financial Network of Terror," provides a detailed description of al Qaeda's activity in West Africa. Corroborative accounts have been published by the London-based nongovernmental organization Global Witness and by the Special Court for Sierra Leone, established by the United Nations to investigate crimes against humanity committed during Sierra Leone's brutal civil war in the 1990s.

Full story: <http://www.ds-osac.org/view.cfm?key=7E4354414351&type=2B170C1E0A3A0F162820>

Related reporting:

al-Qaida made pre-9/11 diamond buy

<http://apnews.myway.com/article/20040807/D84AM2581.html>

Cost of maximum security: \$1.5 billion

They are poised, some 120 Patriot missiles -- PAC-2s and PAC-3s as they are known in the military-intelligence community -- to foil an attack on the XXVIII Olympiad. They are deployed at five sites around Greece's capital city, three in Athens, one on the island of Skyros in the Aegean Sea and another near the northern city of Thessaloniki. Two weeks before Friday's Opening Ceremonies, Air Force General Dimitris Mandilis outlined the plan of defensive action at Tatoi Air Base, 16 miles north of Athens and in close proximity to the Athletes Village.

Full story: <http://sports.espn.go.com/oly/summer04/gen/columns/story?id=1856022>

Related reporting:

ALBANIA: Officials Deploy Special Forces to Border with Greece

On Aug. 10, officials announced the deployment of police and army special forces to the Devoll region bordering Greece. The move follows an increase in airport security announced July 29 when officials at Albania's Rinas Airport (TIA) stepped up measures ahead of the Athens Olympics Aug. 13-29. The measures at the airport and along border areas are intended to strengthen border surveillance to prevent possible terrorist incidents. Several other European airports have tightened security ahead of the Games.

Featured Internet Site

United States Coast Guard (USCG)

America's Waterway Watch

America's Waterway Watch is a national awareness program that asks those who work, live, or recreate on or near the water to be aware of suspicious activity that might indicate threats to our country's homeland security.

<http://www.uscg.mil/hq/gm/mp/aww%5Fwebsite/index.htm>

Also see USCG Home Page

<http://www.uscg.mil/USCG.shtm>

and...Marine Safety Office (MSO) - Chicago

<http://www.uscg.mil/d9/wwm/mso/chicago/>



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