**CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY**          **DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE**

*7 July 2005*

# A Collection of CTC/OTA's Papers on Al-Qa'ida's Threat to the US Homeland (U//FOUO)

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**A Collection of CTC/OTA's Papers on
Al-Qa'ida's Threat to the US Homeland
(U//FOUO)**

This is a collection of papers written at the Unclassified//For Official Use Only level between 30 May 2003 and 27 August 2004 by the CIA Counterterrorism Center's Office of Terrorism Analysis. (U//FOUO)

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## Al-Qa'ida Remains Intent on Defeating US Immigration Inspections  (U//FOUO)

*30 May 2003*

### Valid Passports: Al-Qa'ida's Preferred Option (U//FOUO)

Al-Qa'ida's preferred method remains using a valid passport containing a legitimate US visa or one requiring no visa.  Al-Qa'ida has instructed operatives to travel to the United States on original passports with no indications of dubious travel.

- Operatives may also be encouraged to marry women who possess US visa or European documentation—whether visas or passports—thinking it will make it easier for them to obtain legitimate US visas.

- Al-Qa'ida may be recruiting Asians who possess visa-waiver status in the United States and Canada and have non-Arab appearance.  (U//FOUO)

### Fraudulent Visa-Waiver Passports: Next Best Thing  (U//FOUO)

If unable to enter the United States on a clean document, operatives are instructed to travel in alias, impersonating innocent individuals whose visa-waiver passports have been lost or stolen but unlikely to be on a watchlist.  (U//FOUO)

A large number of al-Qa'ida members have acquired passports from countries whose citizens are permitted to enter the United States without a visa:

- In 2002, we had reporting on more than 300 known or suspected al-Qa'ida members and other extremists who possessed passports—false and genuine—from visa-waiver countries

- Nearly 10 percent of Guantanamo detainees admit to having used false Canadian, British, and other Western passports, the majority of which qualify for the US Visa Waiver Program (VWP).  (U//FOUO)

### Using Computer Software for Alterations (U//FOUO)

Operatives use advanced computer graphic programs like Paintshop Pro, Photoshop, and Adobe Printshop to copy and alter passports.  Forensic analysis of captured materials indicates that al-Qa'ida uses software to scan and replicate travel stamps, visas, and passport security features.  (U//FOUO)

Terrorists could use internet chat rooms that provide tutorials on how to use the technology to alter documents.

- Jihadist chatroom *Sada al-Jihad* has participants willing to supply forged documents or access to those who can assist in procuring them.

- Isam—the chatroom's supervisor who claims to be the brother of Mullah Krekar—is organizing an online course on document forgery in the "Intelligence, Security, and Techniques to Combat Crusaders."

- As of mid-March 2003, Isam had received eight responses, including one giving information on the alteration of images, according to the FBIS translation.  (U//FOUO)

### Coaching Operatives To Circumvent Our Borders (U//FOUO)

Recent information demonstrates al-Qa'ida's ongoing interest to enter the United States over land borders with Mexico and Canada—although it is unclear whether operatives have been advised to present credentials to border authorities or sneak across.  The information obtained includes:

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This report was prepared by the DCI Counterterrorist Center's Office of Terrorism Analysis and the FBI Counterterrorism Division Office of Counterterrorism Analysis, with a contribution from the Passport Analysis Program, OTS.  Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to the Chief, Terrorist Infrastructure Group, OTA, on (703) 874-2397 or 937-2033 secure.  (U)

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- Downloaded internet articles discussing difficulties the United States has in securing its northern and southern borders.

- Instructions on how to avoid suspicion when traveling and questions to expect from immigration inspection officials. (U//FOUO)

Al-Qa'ida operatives are also being coached to have a solid cover story and ensure that they are not using watchlisted passports.

- Operatives are advised to acquire alias documentation—driver's license, residency permit, credit cards, and family photos—that corresponds with a false passport.

- As a final backstop, al-Qa'ida members are told, if possible, to recruit immigration officials with access to databases to ensure the passports were not watchlisted. (U//FOUO)

**Detection Not Easy (U//FOUO)**

US agencies are pooling information on watchlists and lost and stolen passports, but major gaps remain in sharing such information with some countries that have visa-waiver access to the United States. No central repository exists between the United States and the VWP countries to collect and disseminate information on these passports. (U//FOUO)

Although post-11 September 2001 visa issuance and border checks are more rigorous, US name-check systems cannot effectively check transliterated watchlisted non-Western names. This could allow terrorists to receive US visas or enter the United States if travel documents do not match the name-check database, which is often incomplete. In addition, al-Qa'ida operatives are taught to alter their names and biographical data to make tracking more difficult. (U//FOUO)

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## Al-Qa'ida:  Railways a High Priority Target  (U//FOUO)

*7 April 2004*

A comprehensive review of reporting has shed light on al-Qa'ida's strategic doctrine and its possible targets and methods for attacks inside the United States.  A key theme that drives the group's operational doctrine is selecting targets that will have a psychological and economic ripple effect in the United States.  (U//FOUO)

Reporting points to attacks on railways and subways as a means to hurt the US economy and incite mass hysteria.  Al-Qa'ida reportedly considered planning attacks against US railways after observing the economic impact of the 11 September attacks on the US airline industry.

- Rail or subway terminals present many of the same attractions as airport terminals—large crowds and the ability to move about freely and inconspicuously.  Large terminals—such as Union Station in Washington, D.C., and Grand Central Station in New York City—often are in key downtown locations, magnifying the potential disruptive effects of an attack.

- Trains and subways may also be attractive to al-Qa'ida because so many businesses in major urban areas, especially in the northeast, depend on these systems to help their employees commute to work each day. (U//FOUO)

This report was prepared by the DCI Counterterrorist Center's Office of Terrorism Analysis.  Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to the Chief, Plans and Organization Group, OTA, on (703) 874-1571. (U//FOUO)

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## Al-Qa'ida's US Threat: Possible Indicators for Operatives' Profile  (U//FOUO)

*2 July 2004*

**WARNING**:  Unauthorized disclosure of this information will give al-Qa'ida an understanding of US Government efforts to counter its terrorist plans and operations against US interests.  Please treat this information as law enforcement sensitive material. (U//FOUO)

Al-Qa'ida may have made changes in the kinds of operatives it is deploying for US homeland attacks to circumvent enhanced Western security measures. The group still tends to rely on operatives between the ages of 18 to 35 but may now place an added premium on finding suitable "non-Arab" candidates or those with citizenship and/or residency in a targeted country.  Although al-Qa'ida may believe using non-Arab operatives would facilitate easier entry and movement within the United States, the use of Arab operatives—especially if these individuals are already present in the United States—cannot be discounted.  (U//FOUO)

On the basis of al-Qa'ida's established operational ties to North Africa, Central and South Asia (Afghanistan and Pakistan), and Southeast Asia, the group may look to these regions in hopes of finding "non-Arab" operative candidates.  Taken alone, the following ethnic backgrounds do not point to terrorists' identities but when combined with other information—such as suspicious financial transactions and/or travel patterns—may provide a possible indication of terrorist preoperational activity.

- Pakistanis and other South Asians; North Africans, especially Moroccans but also Algerians, Libyans, or Mauritanians are nationalities from which extremists could be tapped.  Many South Asians and North Africans have lived in the United Kingdom and/or other European countries or in Canada, providing them Western documentation and knowledge of the English language—attributes considered valuable by al-Qa'ida.

- Malaysian and Indonesian extremists—many linked to the Southeast Asia terrorist group Jemaah Islamiya—may be considered suitable operatives for attacks inside the United States.

- Al-Qa'ida networks in East Africa, especially in Kenya and Somalia, remain strong and may provide suitable operatives for attacks.

- Central Asians, particularly Uzbeks affiliated with the extremist Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, collaborate with al-Qa'ida.  These ties could spawn cooperation for US homeland attack plotting. (U//FOUO)

### Other Possible Profile Characteristics  (U//FOUO)

Al-Qa'ida traditionally favors using male operatives, which would most likely be the case in a US-based attack.  Nonetheless, extremists' attitudes might be more liberal in North and East Africa and the Levant region, where al-Qa'ida has supporters, about using women operatives.

- Moreover, terrorist operatives might travel with wives or female relatives as a means to lessen their operational profile.  (U//FOUO)

Finding operatives who already have an "in" inside the United States would be extremely important to al-Qa'ida in preparation for a homeland strike.  For example, al-Qa'ida appears to emphasize finding candidates with citizenship or residency status in a targeted country.

- Familiarity with the US homeland and area where targets are located enables greater freedom of movement and access and makes operatives less likely to stand out to immigration or law enforcement officers.

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- Al-Qaʻida leaders have previously tasked individuals with US status to conduct operations inside the United States. Using an individual with US status could also have the desired psychological and propaganda impact sought by al-Qaʻida, particularly this year in the runup to the US Presidential election. (U//FOUO)

**Travel Patterns and Signatures  (U//FOUO)**

Looking back at major plotting efforts against the US homeland by al-Qaʻida, operatives tended at least once to travel to South Asia (Afghanistan and Pakistan) for consultations and training. In several identified cases, Western operatives have been instructed to report their passports lost or stolen—a move most likely taken to conceal the operatives' entry and exit into Afghanistan and Pakistan. Other signposts of possible preoperational terrorist activity are:

- *Individuals of interest who have traveled or show a pattern of travel to South Asia.*

- *Unused visas in passports.* Al-Qaʻida operatives might obtain a visa from countries they perceive are pro-United States—such as Australia and the United Kingdom—to present themselves as a better candidate to US consular officers.

- *Presence of forged non-US stamps in suspect passports.* Some terrorists attempt to counter the "fresh look" of a newly issued passport by placing false stamps in them to create a fictitious travel history. (U//FOUO)

**Following the Money  (U//FOUO)**

Although the funding methods al-Qaʻida is most likely to use in support of a US homeland strike are largely dependent on the scope of the planned attack, the following indicators may assist in identifying avenues worthy of further investigation:

- *Single, large transfers into newly opened bank accounts.*

- *Individuals of interest holding debit cards for bank accounts held overseas.* Use of these cards would eliminate the need to answer required questions that often times accompany wire transfers and also require little interaction with banking and other US Government authorities.

- *Individuals of interest who pay cash for high-priced ticket items.* For example, international and domestic airfare, training opportunities, purchases or lease for extended periods of time of large vehicles or trucks—especially if there is difficulty explaining why and from where the money for that purpose came.

- *Large amounts of cash carried in at US ports of entry and border crossings.* Al-Qaʻida operatives—possibly fearing heightened banking regulations involving electronic transfers and withdrawals—may choose to employ couriers as a means to transport money into the United States. Border crossings along our northern and southern border—especially those that are unmanned at night—are most likely to present attractive alternative points of entry for this purpose. (U//FOUO)

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## Al-Qa'ida:  Looking To Infiltrate the United States Through Mexico  (U//FOUO)

*22 July 2004*

Al-Qaʻida leaders and operational planners have long viewed the southwest border as an access route for operatives infiltrating the United States.  Although we have no evidence that indicates al-Qaʻida operatives have made successful forays into the United States via this method, we remain concerned that the group is seeking to surreptitiously exploit and traverse the vulnerable border and known smuggling networks—particularly to conduct high-impact attacks during symbolic time frames such as the anniversary of 11 September or the November 2004 elections. (U//FOUO)

### Border Seen as Vulnerable  (U//FOUO)

Al-Qaʻida leaders, including those involved in US operations, have long viewed the southern border as an exploitable vulnerability.

- Al-Qaʻida reportedly has concluded that it is "easy" to move people across the border and that drug smugglers would know the best routes.

- Cinematic films, the Internet, and other media sources have contributed to al-Qaʻida's knowledge on border vulnerabilities, which some members believe is similar to border crossing posts in South Asia.  Several al-Qaʻida leaders believe operatives can pay their way into the United States through Mexico.  (U//FOUO)

Some al-Qaʻida members believe that illegal versus legal entry from Mexico into the United States is more advantageous for operational security reasons.

- Legal entry was assessed to be risky because US officials kept files on individuals—even US citizens—involved in extremist activities.  In addition, US watchlisting efforts can be circumvented if an operative transits the border illegally.  (U//FOUO)

### Non-Mexicans Difficult To Intercept  (U//FOUO)

Many alien smuggling networks that facilitate the movement of non-Mexicans have established links to Muslim communities in Mexico, making them attractive to al-Qaʻida.  Non-Mexicans often are more difficult to intercept because they typically pay high-end smugglers a large sum of money to efficiently assist them across the border, rather than haphazardly traverse it on their own.

- Penetration and disruption of these networks might provide critical information on individuals paying them to cross the border.  (U//FOUO)

### Border Security Challenges  (U//FOUO)

Significant strides against smuggling networks have been made, but the huge number of legal and illegal border crossings per day remain a challenge.

- The total number of individuals crossing legally into the United States from Mexico by car, bus, and foot was more than 250 million in 2002, according to US Department of Transportation statistics.  The San Ysidro, California—Tijuana, Mexico port of entry is the largest land-crossing border in the world, with more than 45 million persons crossing in 2002.

- An estimated one million individuals are caught each year attempting to enter the United States illegally from Mexico.  (U//FOUO)

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**Latin America as a Stepping Stone  (U//FOUO)**

Al-Qaʻida may look to Latin America—particularly those countries with few visa restrictions—as a gateway to Mexico for onward travel to the United States.

- Latin American passports have been confiscated from al-Qaʻida–associated safehouses in South Asia.

- Al-Qaʻida leaders have reported the intention—as early as the mid-1990s—to surveil the US-Mexican border by way of Latin American countries for potential smuggling routes to insert operatives into the United States.  It is unknown if surveillance activity had ever taken place.

- Al-Qaʻida operatives have attempted to research required documents for travel to South American countries, particularly Brazil and Colombia. (U//FOUO)

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## A Primer of Al-Qa'ida's Modus Operandi and Possible Attack Signatures (U//FOUO)

*28 July 2004*

The following information should not be considered the sole indicators of al-Qa'ida's attack planning since signatures may vary with planners, targets, and methodology. Moreover, al-Qa'ida is known for its operational creativity and flexibility in dealing with shifting security environments. Please treat this information as law enforcement sensitive material. (U//FOUO)

Al-Qa'ida is planning to attack inside the United States in the coming months. Although there are no specific details on the target(s), operatives, or methods of attack, a review of the group's strategic targeting doctrine provides insights into the group's past criteria for target choices in the United States and general operating style for US-based attacks. (U//FOUO)

**Targets and Methods of an Attack (U//FOUO)**

The group is most likely to select political, military, and/or economic targets based on the following three criteria:

- Targets that are recognized symbols of US life and power, especially in the Muslim world.

- Targets that will result in mass casualties and spread fear and panic hurting US morale.

- Targets whose destruction will negatively impact the US economy. (U//FOUO)

Potential targets that meet these key criteria can be "hard" targets such as key US Government buildings and/or military bases, or "soft" targets such as bridges, commercial buildings, and/or mass transit systems.

- Near simultaneous, multiple attacks against critical US infrastructure—such as mass transit systems and/or key energy sector facilities—would most likely meet all three targeting goals.

- Similarly, attacks in the host cities for the Democratic and Republican party conventions or Presidential debates also have the potential to meet these key criteria. (U//FOUO)

A review of al-Qa'ida's modus operandi suggests the method(s) of attack will very likely be dictated by target selection. Al-Qa'ida operatives are most likely to opt for an attack method that has the highest probability of success, having made this determination based on security around a given target.

- Al-Qa'ida leadership encourages senior plotters and operatives to "brainstorm" and propose ideas based on previous operations, available operatives, and open source reports. The group's use of commercial aircraft as missiles, the use of shoes to conceal explosives, and the use of vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIEDs) disguised as security vehicles are examples of the innovative methodologies al-Qa'ida has applied to given targets and security situations.

- Although al-Qa'ida leadership generally has played a central role in target selection in US homeland plotting, deployed field planners—particularly post–11 September 2001—may have more autonomy to pick and execute attacks against selected targets already approved by top leaders. (U//FOUO)

**On-the-Ground Managers  (U//FOUO)**

These key individuals are the forward-deployed leaders of a given operation—most likely knowledgeable of all facets of the operation, including the intended targets, timing, and methods of attack.

- These are the "Muhammad Attas" of the plot.  Atta was a pilot and the senior field coordinator of the 11 September 2001 attacks.

- Ideally, these operatives would have arrived at least a year before the planned attack and may not travel with other members of the team.

- These operatives may have autonomy to change both targets and timing of the operation if the situation on the ground dictates.

- Should field planners be known to US Government agencies—a risk that al-Qaʻida leaders might be willing to accept to ensure the necessary skills and experience—the timely collection and reporting of suspect individuals' names, aliases, and other contact information may help in disrupting a planned terrorist attack.  (U//FOUO)


**Operational Foot Soldiers  (U//FOUO)**

Due to heightened security since 11 September 2001, the "muscle" of a given operation may now be chosen by field planners, if secure communication or access to senior leadership is not available.

- To safe guard the operation, attack operatives would most likely be told only as much as needed about a terrorist operation and may not know exact details until the moment of execution.

- Depending on the operation, these operatives may not enter the target country until it is absolutely necessary to decrease chances of compromise.  In addition, "muscle" operatives—while possibly traveling together in small groups—would most likely travel in a staggered fashion to avoid

suspicious travel patterns and other activity that could raise their profile or the risk that large sets of operatives could be detained at one time. (U//FOUO)


**Expected Behavior of Operatives (U//FOUO)**

Although operatives are expected to behave in certain ways to reduce their profile and avoid drawing the attention of authorities, they can make mistakes and may not adhere to strict operational instructions.

- Operatives are told to live as close to their "cover" as possible.  For example, "students" should enroll in classes, and "tourists" should have maps, brochures, hotel bills, and other items consistent with their selected cover.

- Operatives should not live near the target due to security precautions and should avoid contact with anyone, including Arabs and Muslims, outside their immediate operational group.

- Operatives are instructed to pray quietly at home vice openly at a public gathering and should generally downplay their religion.

- To further minimize contact with a broad range of individuals, operatives are instructed to only acquire jobs if appropriate for cover.  (U//FOUO)


**Timing of the Attack  (U//FOUO)**

Determining the precise day or time of attack is extremely difficult since the field planners and operatives will very likely have autonomy to select the optimum time.

- External factors beyond the control of leadership or ground operatives, including weather and/or increased security postures of designated targets, may alter decisions in the final stages.

- Although al-Qaʻida leaders may prefer to time attacks with anniversary dates of previous attacks or

other symbolic occasions, the single most important factor in executing the attack appears to be operational readiness and probability of success regardless of the date.  (U//FOUO)

**Procuring Weapons   (U//FOUO)**

The following signatures are based on the possibility that al-Qaʻida may use VBIEDs in an attack.

- Ideally, explosives and precursors would be acquired in a nonalerting manner a month or more in advance, which would allow more flexibility in choosing the timing of the attack.

- Some likely choices, such as ammonium nitrate mixtures, however, absorb moisture and degrade if mixed too far in advance.

- In addition, vehicle bombs are usually assembled just before the attack for security reasons.

- The explosives or precursors should be purchased in small quantities from the lowest source of distribution possible in order to limit possible alerting tipoffs to law enforcement authorities.

- The vehicle(s) used in an attack should be purchased weeks to months before the actual attack date to test its functionality and load capacity.

- Stealing a vehicle to be used in an attack is discouraged because of the unnecessary risk of exposure.  In addition, buying allows more control over the situation and the vehicles, leaving a limited trail for law enforcement to follow.

- Operatives most likely would rely on a private enclosed space to build VBIEDs—including garages, storage units, and/or rented or abandoned warehouses.  (U//FOUO)

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## Al-Qa'ida: Eyeing Vehicular Bombs for US Homeland Attacks  (U//FOUO)

*24 August 2004*

The following information should not be considered the sole method of al-Qa'ida attack planning since the group is known for its operational creativity and flexibility with shifting security environments.  Please treat this information as law enforcement sensitive material.  (U//FOUO)

Reporting during the last few months-has indicated al-Qa'ida's intent to conduct large-scale attacks against the US homeland ahead of the Presidential election in 2004. The plan may involve using vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIEDs). Al-Qa'ida has a long and successful history of using VBIEDs in attacks against US and Western targets.

- Over the past year and a half, al-Qa'ida and associated groups in four separate geographic regions have used large-scale vehicular bombs to attack a range of targets overseas, including foreign housing compounds in Saudi Arabia; the British Consulate, Jewish synagogues, and Western businesses in Turkey, and nightclubs and hotels in Indonesia and Kenya.  (U//FOUO)

**Proven Skill and Tactics  (U//FOUO)**

Methods used in such attacks and disrupted plots underscore the group's experience in employing explosive-laden vehicles. A trademark of the group is an attack incorporating multiple vehicles combined with an armed assault to tackle somewhat protected structures.

- Each of the three attacks in Riyadh in May 2003 drew on the use of two vehicles—one carrying armed assailants to gain entrance to the compound followed by a second containing a bomb for use inside the compound. All three attacks occurred within fifteen minutes of one another.  (U//FOUO)

Al-Qa'ida also may combine high explosives with other combustible or toxic material to boost the damage from VBIED attacks.  Al-Qa'ida operatives had previously pursued using trucks carrying hazardous material or fuel for such attacks in the United States.

- Detained al-Qa'ida operative Iyman Faris, who had ties to Khalid Shaykh Muhammad, was licensed to transport hazardous materials within the United States.  (U//FOUO)

**High-Value Targets Still Accessible  (U//FOUO)**

Al-Qa'ida will likely select targets that it judges will have a significant physical and psychological impact if attacked.  Plotters may turn to alternative targets if they judge the primary targets too difficult to strike.

- Attacking **symbols of US power**—especially key US Government buildings in Washington, DC, and economic centers such as Wall Street—with multiple VBIEDs would still have a significant psychological and economic impact even if physical damage were minimal.

- Al-Qa'ida has long considered attacks against major **infrastructure** such as bridges, ports, airports, and tunnels, in part because of the difficulty in protecting them. Al-Qa'ida's disrupted millennium plot targeted the Los Angeles airport with VBIEDs. (U//FOUO)

Other **soft targets** such as banks, shopping malls, major US companies, and tall buildings in major cities are at risk of VBIED attacks.  A large body of reporting since 2001 suggests al-Qa'ida continues to view soft targets as prime alternatives to more hardened targets.  Hitting a number of such structures simultaneously could have the same cumulative impact as attacking a single high-profile target. (U//FOUO)

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## Al-Qa'ida Surveillance: Tradecraft, Tactics, and Indicators  (U//FOUO)

*27 August 2004*

Surveillance is a critically important part of al-Qaʻida's attack planning and strategic targeting doctrine. Al-Qaʻida relies on preoperational surveillance to conceptualize an attack, driving the selection of targets, appropriate operatives, and the mode of attack.

- An understanding of al-Qaʻida's surveillance tactics helps us to identify a set of specific behaviors—indicators that could help the law enforcement and Intelligence Communities more easily detect such activities.  (U//FOUO)

### Security Assessment Key To Target Selection (U//FOUO)

In assessing possible targets, al-Qaʻida looks intently at security measures and vulnerabilities.

- Al-Qaʻida might look for targets that would appear to offer the greatest probability for a successful attack—based on an assessment of the target's security level—even if hitting such a target would result in a lower number of casualties.

- For example, al-Qaʻida might seek multiple small attacks instead of larger sensational attacks. (U//FOUO)

### Reliance on Surveillance Tradecraft  (U//FOUO)

Al-Qaʻida employs a security-conscious surveillance methodology. Operatives are instructed to conduct surveillance using the following methods:

- Al-Qaʻida operatives may use various *static and mobile surveillance techniques* to acquire the pertinent information without drawing attention. Surveillants are expected to be familiar with the physical layout of the target buildings, local security measures, the area around the target, surrounding streets and buildings, and vehicular and pedestrian traffic levels during rush hour and off-peak hours.

- Al-Qaʻida operatives may use *disguises* to evade detection—this may include wearing a cross, ordering alcohol, or being accompanied by women.

- Operatives are taught to be *comfortable functioning in an unfamiliar urban environment*.

- Al-Qaʻida operatives might *test the security response* and reaction time at target sites—this might include leaving baggage unattended, parking cars in conspicuous places, or possibly carrying bags of suspicious-looking material through security checkpoints to assess the response time of target security personnel.  (U//FOUO)

### Unknowns: Timing and Team Composition (U//FOUO)

Although al-Qaʻida relies on comprehensive surveillance reports to determine the final target, timing, and method of an attack, there is no required time frame for casing a target—suggesting that surveillance can be conducted during a period of days, months, or even years.

- Although the duration, nature, and frequency of surveillance most likely depends on the target and its surrounding environment, we assess that surveillance of potential targets in the United States would most likely start up to a year in advance of an attack.

- If a potential target has enhanced security, operatives might choose to case the target only a few times.  (U//FOUO)

This report was prepared by the DCI Counterterrorist Center's Office of Terrorism Analysis.  Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to the Chief, Al-Qaʻida Plans and Organization Group, OTA, on (703) 874-1571 or 72508 secure.  (U)

CTC 2004-30108

**Indicators for a Homeland Plot (U//FOUO)**

Al-Qaʻida may be planning attacks in the United States in the coming months. Although we have no specific intelligence to indicate the target, timing, or method of the attack, al-Qaʻida may seek to employ its surveillance tactics in the runup to the attack.

• Consistent with al-Qaʻida's determination to evade security measures after 11 September, we assess the group is looking to use nontraditional operatives to conduct future operations—this includes operatives who might resemble local residents or tourists commonly seen in the target area, who might speak the local dialect, and who might easily adapt to a cover legend as a tourist or a student. (U//FOUO)

Given its critical role in al-Qaʻida's planning cycle, surveillance—if detected—would serve as an indicator of an upcoming attack. Al-Qaʻida operatives have been taught to case targets at every phase of the planning cycle—suggesting multiple opportunities to detect preoperational activity.

• The importance that al-Qaʻida places on weak security in determining its final target selection suggests that proactive and variable security countermeasures at suspected targets may, at least, interrupt the attack planning. (U//FOUO)

Nevertheless, operatives have been taught to conduct target casings multiple times before an attack— making it difficult to determine whether a plot is in the preliminary or final stages.

• We assess that, if al-Qaʻida decided to abort an operation inside the United States, operatives would likely turn over their targeting studies to new operatives if the target remained viable. (U//FOUO)