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From: OpsNewsTicker
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To: NEWS-Mahogany; SES-O
Subject: Bin Laden was in on 2005 and 2006 London plots (Reuters)

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Osama bin Laden was aware of the plot in which al Qaeda militants bombed London transport facilities on July 7, 2005, but it was the last successful operation he played a role in, U.S. government experts have concluded.

Circumstantial evidence, including information gathered from the Abbotabad, Pakistan, hide-out where U.S. Navy SEALs killed bin Laden on May 2, also suggests that bin Laden had advance knowledge of an unsuccessful London-based 2006 plot to simultaneously bomb U.S.-bound transatlantic flights, several U.S. national security officials said.

"Bin Laden was absolutely a detail guy. We have every reason to believe that he was aware of al Qaeda's major plots during the planning phase, including the airline plot in 2006 and the London '7-7' attacks," one of the U.S. officials told Reuters. This official and others spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss counter-terrorism matters.

Some of the confidence U.S. officials expressed about bin Laden's involvement in the London attacks is based on analytical judgment rather than ironclad proof. Two of the officials said that there was no "smoking gun" evidence proving that he orchestrated the plots.

However, they and other U.S. officials said there is strong evidence, including material collected from bin Laden's lair, indicating that, as the London-based plots unfolded, bin Laden was in close contact with other al Qaeda militants. One official said bin Laden was "immersed in operational details" of the group's activities.

"We believe he was aware of these plots ahead of time," one of the officials said.

Fifty-two civilians, and four suicide bombers, died in the July 7, 2005, attacks on three London underground trains and a double-decker bus. Hundreds were injured. It was "the last successful operation Osama bin Laden oversaw," a second official said.

The latest assessments from U.S. and other Western officials support assertions by the Obama administration that, despite years of apparent isolation in Abbotabad, bin Laden still managed to keep in touch with activities -- sometimes in considerable detail -- of his followers around the world.

NO EVIDENCE OF NEW PLOTS

By the same token, the cache of evidence found in bin Laden's lair does not offer new indications about any specific current plots he was involved in directed at U.S. or other Western targets.

Investigations by British authorities, with support from the United States and other allies, established some time ago that elements of al Qaeda's core leadership had played a role in the 2005 London transport attacks.

Investigators found evidence that Mohammad Sidique Khan, leader of the four-man militant cell who carried out the bombings, and another cell member had traveled to Pakistan for paramilitary training before the attacks.

Until recently, however, investigators had not linked bin Laden personally to the July 7, 2005, attacks. Two weeks after those bombings, a cell of militants attempted a second round of attacks on London transport facilities but their bombs failed to go off.

A Western official said there was also reason to believe that al Qaeda's core leadership was involved in orchestrating subsequent failed plots against European and U.S. targets.

One of the plots that U.S. officials believe bin Laden was at least aware of was a 2006 plot to bomb multiple U.S.-bound transatlantic airline flights using home-made liquid explosives.

The plot was disrupted when British authorities launched a major roundup of suspects. Flights to and from Britain were severely disrupted and tight new restrictions were placed on passenger carry-on items such as liquids and gels.

U.S. and European officials also believe that al Qaeda "senior leadership" supervised a 2009 plot, led by an Afghan immigrant, to bomb New York's subway system. That plot was disrupted when U.S. authorities arrested the alleged mastermind, Najibullah Zazi, and a handful of associates.

Since bin Laden was killed, evidence has emerged that he was personally involved in plots against European targets last year, one U.S. official said. Intelligence about these plots led to the issuing of public travel warnings by European and U.S. government agencies beginning late September.

Counter-terrorism officials warned at the time that militants might be targeting cities in European countries, including Germany, France and Britain, for strikes similar to the commando attacks in Mumbai, India, which a group of Pakistan-based militants carried out in November 2008.

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