

Experts see earmarks of Sept. 11 in airline conspiracy

By [JULIA MALONE](#)

Cox News Service

Friday, August 11, 2006

http://www.oxfordpress.com/news/content/shared/news/stories/TERROR_HOMELAND11_COX_W9164.html

WASHINGTON — The alleged plot to blow up airliners over the Atlantic ocean bears many of the hallmarks of the terrorist attacks on the United States nearly five years ago, security experts and officials said Thursday.

In its complexity, ingenuity and violent aims, the unfolding details of the conspiracy pointed to a sequel of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, providing a vivid reminder of the tenacity of terrorist networks that continue to target Americans and Westerners, these specialists said.

"There is no doubt that it's very sophisticated and requires a lot of professionals," said **Yonah Alexander of the Potomac Institute for Policy Studies**, a Virginia based research group that focuses on national security. "These are not explosives in a basement."

"We are being challenged by a very vicious operation to disrupt the normal way of life," he said.

James Jay Carafano, a terrorist specialist at the conservative Heritage Foundation, said Americans "should take away some very common sense lessons" from the reported break-up of the plot. One lesson, he said, is, "There really are people out there trying to kill us, and we need to stop them."

Second, he argued, is the necessity of using "lawful ways like the Patriot Act" to track down and share information. Officials were able to track down the plotters in Britain, just as their Canadian counterparts broke up an apparent terrorist ring in Toronto and U.S. authorities made arrests in Miami in other alleged conspiracies.

And finally, Carafano said the latest incident shows how much has changed in the increased international cooperation by investigators and the ability of the U.S. government to move faster—as it did overnight by instituting new airport security measures, including banning most liquids for airline passengers and dispatching more air marshals for transatlantic flights—within a few hours.

In fact, he suggested that despite the first ever "code red" alert, designated by the Department of Homeland Security for U.S.-Great Britain flights, flying might be safer than before. "Terrorists like predictability," Carafano said, adding that now would not be a likely time for them to strike.

Mike Barrett, a counter-terrorism expert with the Manhattan Institute for Public Policy, a New York think tank, joined in arguing that the breakthrough in Britain bolsters the aggressive use of intelligence-gathering tools.

"I really would hope that people would understand that this is a serious risk, and we have to have these tools at our disposal" to stop future attacks, Barrett said.

Decades of dealing with violence in Northern Ireland have left the British public more accepting of

surveillance than Americans, he said, suggesting that Americans should make the same adjustment.

U.S. officials and experts stopped short of identifying the airline plot as coming directly from the terrorist commander Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaida operation, even if the methods were familiar.

"We can't jump to conclusions," said David Heyman, terrorist expert at the Center for Strategic and International Affairs, a Washington, D.C., policy research group. In fact, he said it would be "more concerning" if the 24 alleged plotters, all of them reported by U.S. Homeland Security officials to be British citizens, were a "homegrown" group.

"It's much harder to screen individuals who are citizens," Heyman said.

Even so, Heyman said the new case fits the al-Qaida pattern. That group attempted and failed to destroy the World Trade Center in 1993 with a truck bomb and came back to complete the job with airliners in 2001, he said.

It would be typical that the same group would attempt a plot five years later "that looks like it would be more serious, more destructive," he said.

Although this plot appears to be broken up, Heyman added, it's a reminder that "we're not out of the woods yet." Moreover, he said it makes the case for an international focus for confronting terrorism. "If you want to be safe at home, you have to be safe abroad," he said.

Randy Beers, a former counter-terrorism official-turned critic of the Bush administration and of the Iraq war, generally approved of the actions taken in the airliner case. "My concern would still be that we weren't able to really close down al-Qaida when we had an opportunity," he said.

But looking at the alleged new plot, Beers said, "This does not appear to be any hype" and added that "we as Americans have to deal with it."

Julia Malone is a Washington correspondent for Cox Newspapers.