

# Al Qaeda warns of threat to water supply

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By Shaun Waterman

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A spokesman for al Qaeda has told an Arabic-language newsmagazine that the terror group will try to use poisons to attack the United States, specifically threatening to contaminate the nation's water supply.

Abu Mohammed al-Ablaj told the London-based al-Majallah magazine that "al Qaeda [does not rule out] using sarin gas and poisoning drinking water in U.S. and Western cities."

"We will talk about [these weapons] then and the infidels will know what harms them. They spared no effort in their war on us in Afghanistan. ... They should not therefore rule out the possibility that we will present them with our capabilities," the magazine quotes al-Ablaj as saying in an e-mail interview last week.

The interview was published in the latest edition of al-Majallah, dated Sunday.

Some U.S. officials play down the threat, but terrorism analysts point out that al-Ablaj had communicated with the magazine before the suicide attacks earlier this month in Saudi Arabia, warning that al Qaeda was about to stage a major offensive in the kingdom.

"The consensus seems to be — and I concur — that [al-Ablaj] is credible and does have a connection with al Qaeda," Ben Venzke, a counterterrorism analyst who consults with U.S. government agencies, told United Press International.

"The statements he makes should be taken seriously, especially in light of his apparent prior knowledge of the Riyadh bombings," Mr. Venzke said.

A U.S. intelligence official, who would not comment on al-Ablaj's credibility, played down the threat to U.S. water supplies in an interview with UPI.

"It is very difficult to covertly poison a reservoir," the official said on the condition of anonymity. "It would take many truckloads of poison, which would make it difficult to do secretly. That is not really a viable threat."

Al-Ablaj, who describes himself as the commander of al Qaeda's "mujahideen training center," first contacted al-Majallah in March, the magazine said.

A U.S. government translation of a recent article says that al-Ablaj sent the magazine an e-mail April 7, declaring that Osama bin Laden's terrorists "had completed their

preparations to carry out a massive action targeting the [Saudi] regime ... and that this action would be implemented within one month or less."

The magazine "opted not to publish its contents in order to check its validity," the translation continues.

On May 10, two days before the series of coordinated suicide attacks in Riyadh killed 34 persons, including eight Americans, he e-mailed the magazine again. In the interim, Saudi authorities had broken up a cell of 19 al Qaeda suspects.

The plan "was not affected by the Saudi security services' success," the magazine reported him as saying.

"He said the plan is proceeding," the magazine said in a report published less than 24 hours after the attacks, "without any significant changes and [he] pointed out that the time is getting closer day by day to prove the validity of what he is saying."

Mr. Venzke said that "beyond his communications to al-Majallah, al-Ablaj is an unknown quantity. But his blip on the radar screen got a lot bigger after that."

"The threat and the tone is consistent with other messages from al Qaeda, and we believe that the communication channel is credible," he added.

The U.S. intelligence official also played down threats to even a single building.

"It's more feasible if they try to poison a specific building," the official said. "But even then, the volume of water already going through the system would dilute whatever was introduced. It would be very difficult to kill anyone. What would happen would be that people would get sick, which would cause panic."

An FBI bulletin early last year, cited in Mr. Venzke's book, "The al-Qaeda Threat" stated that "U.S. law enforcement and intelligence agencies have learned that al Qaeda members ... specifically sought information on water supply and wastewater management practices in the United States and abroad."