

Unanswered questions over Stockholm suicide bomb attack

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Ezedden Khalid Ahmed al-Khaledi, a 30-year-old nursing student claiming to be from Kuwait, has been charged with helping fund the December 2010 Stockholm suicide bomb attack.

Arrested at his council flat in a tower block in Whiteinch, Glasgow, al-Khaledi is accused of providing money to the bomber between June 2009 and the time of the attack on Christmas shoppers. He is also charged with having “entered into an arrangement” to provide money for terrorism activities as far back as January 2003.

A court hearing has been held behind closed doors at Glasgow Sheriff Court after Strathclyde Police were granted an extension of the time a detainee can be questioned without charge.

The arrest adds to anomalies surrounding the Stockholm attack, the first suicide bombing in Swedish history.

On December 11, a car bomb exploded in Drottninggatan in central Stockholm. The minor blast injured two passersby, while most of the gas canisters in the car failed to explode. Ten minutes later, another explosion 300 metres from the car bomb killed one man, Taimour Abdulwahab al-Abdaly, a 28-year-old Swedish Iraqi, who had been living in Luton, north of London. Only 1 of 12 gas canisters strapped to Abdaly exploded, while a backpack nail bomb he was carrying did not explode.

An e-mail from Abdaly containing audio files sent to the Swedish press 10 minutes before the attack protested against anti-Islamic cartoons by Swedish artist Lars Vilks and the Swedish military involvement in Afghanistan. Abdaly, who blew himself up the day before his 29th birthday, was a sports science graduate and father of three whose parents moved from Iraq to Sweden in 1992 just after the first US-led Gulf War. In

the audio recording, he asked his family’s forgiveness. The car bomb was in an Audi registered in his name.

The attack was described as similar to suicide attacks in London and Glasgow Airport in 2007 and New York in 2010 in terms of the homemade, but potentially murderous, character of the devices used.

Immediately after the blast, Prosecutor Lindstrand stated, “As it looks now, he was alone in carrying out the act.” In February of this year, a Swedish Security Service (Sapo) spokeswoman reiterated this point, saying, “there is nothing for the time being indicating he had accomplices”.

A number of factors surrounding Abdaly’s attack on innocent Stockholm citizens should at least give rise to suspicions that the Swedish, and other, authorities may have had some level of foreknowledge.

Firstly, there appears to have been a warning. On December 12, Swedish news agency TT reported that an employee of the Swedish armed forces had sent a message to an associate several hours before the blast, warning, “If you can, avoid Drottninggatan today. A lot could happen there...just so you know.”

In January, TT’s editorial chief Mats Johansson defended the report against suggestions from Sapo that the warning may have come from another news agency.

Secondly, there are contradictions in reports regarding whether the authorities knew of Abdaly prior to the attack. On December 13, chief prosecutor Tomas Lindstrand reported to a press conference that Abdaly was “completely unknown” to Swedish intelligence officials. At the same conference, Anders Thornberg from Sapo reported that despite Lindstrand having stated that Abdaly was unknown—and therefore potentially not working alone—“there is no reason to worry” that another attack was imminent.

In January, TT reported that Abdaly was known to

have been training in Mosul, Iraq, for some three months. A report from *Al Arabiya*, and quoted by TT, states that General Dhahi Kanami, head of the US-backed Iraqi puppet government's anti-terrorism unit, obtained information from a detainee in Baghdad that suggested Abdaly entered Iraq from Turkey. Kanami claims this information, along with a warning of a future Al Qaeda atrocity, was passed onto US intelligence at least two months before the Stockholm attack.

One of the issues made clear to the world by the WikiLeaks cable releases from the US embassy in Stockholm, and going a way to explaining the Swedish authorities' vendetta against WikiLeaks and its founder Julian Assange, is the close level of intelligence collaboration between the Swedish Moderate-led government of Fredrik Reinfeldt, its Social Democratic predecessor, and Washington.

A May 2007 cable from then Ambassador Michael Wood summarising the US attitude to Reinfeldt praised the Swedish military and civilian intelligence as "strong and reliable partners." There was "good cooperation on counterterrorism, both domestically and internationally," he noted.

Wood acknowledged the extent to which this collusion proceeds behind the backs of the Swedish population: "Due to domestic political considerations, the extent of this cooperation is not widely known within the Swedish government.... [P]ublic mention of the cooperation would open up the government to domestic criticism."

The cables also exposed Swedish policy on Afghanistan, where hundreds of troops are deployed as part of the NATO's ISAF occupation force.

A 2008 cable, for example, from embassy official Robert Silverman noted a Swedish request from both Goran Lennmaker, of the Moderates, and Urban Ahlin, from the opposition Social Democrats, for assistance prior to the 2008 debate in the Swedish parliament on extending the mandate for Swedish forces in Afghanistan. Ahlin explained that the Social Democrats would have to explain their support for the occupation and requested US assistance "in getting a senior Afghanistan government official to come to Sweden to relate humanitarian stories."

Another 2008 cable from another US official, Marc Koehler, noted Swedish concern regarding the

possibility of formal surveillance arrangements with US Homeland Security. A team from the Swedish Ministry of Justice warned that "existing informal channels, which cover a wide range of law enforcement and anti-terrorism cooperation, would be scrutinised more intensely by Parliament and perhaps jeopardised."

If the US government knew of Abdaly, then, should it have suited US interests, elements within the Swedish state, a close US ally, would have been informed about him too.

The attack took place five days before a parliamentary vote in the Riksdag (parliament) on extending the Swedish military role in Afghanistan. During the 2010 election, the Social Democrats, the Greens and the Left Party supported the deployment but agreed to wind it down by 2014, and presented this position as opposing an unpopular war.

Just before the vote, however, the Social Democrats, Greens and the Moderates, under the guise of keeping the far-right Sweden Democrats out of power, came to a deal—part of which was to remove time limits on the Swedish deployment, which was now expected to extend "far beyond 2014."

Social Democrat leader Mona Sahlin described the deployment as "too important to leave up to an uncertain situation in parliament". The government easily won the vote.



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