

Massive IS Cairo Car Bomb Underlines Focus On State Targets

BY BRIAN ROHAN

Associated Press

CAIRO — A massive pre-dawn car bomb by Islamic State extremists blasted the facade off a police headquarters Thursday and rattled windows across Cairo — wounding 29 but causing no deaths.

The attack reflected a strategy of the group's branch in Egypt, which has targeted authorities but avoided spectacularly bloody civilian casualties — at least for now.

Two years of violence in a militant campaign has left hundreds dead in Egypt, mainly police and soldiers, and a string of attacks in the capital have undermined President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi's claim to bring order to the country.

The main, Sinai-based militant organization, which swore allegiance to the Islamic State group last year, has shown worrying signs of the Iraq- and Syria-based extremists' notorious brutality — most notably, the beheading this month of a Croatian captive.

But its strategy also shows differences with the Islamic State core, which has ruthlessly slaughtered civilians in Iraq, Syria and Yemen, including in suicide bombings in markets and mosques.

Thursday's attack in the Egyptian capital was the third time the group has carried out a large bombing at

an hour when most people are asleep or off the streets — an apparent attempt to limit public outrage against the branch.

Its past similar attacks all led to few casualties or deaths, mostly among police. These include the dawn bombing of the Italian Embassy in Cairo last month, which killed one person; a huge truck bomb in January 2014 targeting Cairo's security headquarters, which killed four policemen; and a car bomb a month earlier that tore through a security headquarters in the Nile Delta city of Mansoura, killing 16 people, nearly all policemen.

The first two of those attacks were claimed by Ansar Beit al-Maqdis, as the affiliate was called when it began targeting the government following the military's ouster of an Islamist president in 2013 — and before it pledged allegiance to the IS group last year.

"The style of the attacks are a little different than what we've come to expect from the IS group, as there is an absence of mass casualties when it comes to urban areas," said H.A. Hellyer, a security expert at the Brookings Institute think tank in Washington. "That may be attributed to its recruitment strategies, but we can't assume that it won't change tactics going forward."

The differences are likely rooted in two factors. Egypt is overwhelmingly Sunni

Muslim with a Christian minority of around 10 percent, and has virtually no population of Shiite Muslims, the community that IS mainly targets in its worst mass attacks elsewhere.

Also, the Egyptian branch is a homegrown group whose original name, Ansar Beit al-Maqdis, means Champions of Jerusalem. It stepped up its insurgency in revenge for a police crackdown on Islamists following the military's 2013 ouster of Islamist President Mohammed Morsi. Its homegrown status likely makes it more attentive to local sentiment.

Thursday's blast, which went off just before 2 a.m., fits the group's pattern of attacks. It demolished a wall in front of the security building, bringing down watch towers and leaving gaping holes exposing its offices. Of those hurt, 11 were police and soldiers.

Authorities said high-powered explosives were used in the blast, which was heard and felt across the city, damaging nearby schools and court buildings. It also shattered colored glass windows and cracked the walls of a nearby palace built by Muhammad Ali, an early 19th-century ruler of Egypt.

Glass from blown-out windows littered the streets in the Shubra el-Kheima neighborhood, at the northern entrance to the capital. Security forces with assault rifles set up roadblocks to

ward off onlookers and some hysterical residents. The blast left a 16-foot (five-meter) crater, and the engine of the pickup truck used in the attack landed over a dozen yards (meters) down the street.

In its claim of responsibility posted on its Al-Bayan radio station, IS said that "soldiers of the caliphate" had carried out the attack. A statement issued by the IS Egypt affiliate and circulated by supporters online said it was to avenge the execution of six convicted militants in May.

The men were sentenced by a military court in proceedings heavily criticized by human rights organizations, some of whom pointed out that three of the defendants were in detention when they are accused of carrying out attacks. That suggests the group has specific grievances, tactics, and sensitivities particular to Egypt — and a vendetta primarily against its current, military-backed leadership and state institutions.

Egypt has seen a surge of assaults on security forces since the army overthrew Morsi, an Islamist who was the country's first freely elected president but whose divisive rule led to mass protests demanding he resign. The violence has largely been confined to the restive northern part of the Sinai Peninsula, but Cairo and other parts of the mainland have been rocked by explo-

sions, mostly small-scale, targeting police.

At Thursday's blast site, a tragic sense of resignation was palpable. Inside his ruined clinic next door to the security building, plastic surgeon Dr. Gawad Mahmoud lamented Egypt's troubles since Morsi's ouster, and criticized the country's current direction.

"We were here painting the office, and then it went off. It was like an earthquake, it blew the doors off and smashed all the windows in," he said. "We are not living in a normal state here, the way this place is run."

Access to the area was highly restricted, even in the minutes immediately following the blast, with dozens of policemen, plainclothes and uniformed, on guard. Press credentials of the few foreign journalists who managed to arrive were checked repeatedly by authorities, the latest manifestation of a distrust of foreigners fed by Egypt's state and private media.

The prosecutor general's office said the bomb was hidden inside the bed of a white pickup truck, which detonated shortly after its driver parked next to the building then sped off on a motorcycle.

The attacks since Morsi's overthrow have continued in step with a heavy crackdown against his supporters and dissent in general, led by el-Sissi, the former military chief who ousted him. Hun-

dreds have been killed and thousands jailed.

Last week, el-Sissi decreed a new far-reaching anti-terrorism law that sets a sweeping definition for who can face a harsh set of punishments. Journalists can be fined for reporting that contradicts Defense Ministry statements.

Egypt has lacked a legislature for three years, and el-Sissi has single-handedly passed dozens of laws since being elected just over a year ago on promises to pull the country back together and fix a sagging economy after years of tumult since the 2011 uprising against longtime autocrat Hosni Mubarak.

Analysts and scholars say the broad, heavy-handed crackdown on dissent which involves alleged torture, forced disappearances and mysterious deaths in police custody, is generating not only resentment, but extremism, possibly driving some to violence.

Thursday's bombing is part of a worrying uptick in attacks in urban areas, Hellyer said.

The IS group's "Egyptian affiliate has been able, from its home base in the Sinai, it seems, to commander or create cells within Cairo, with spectacularly worrying results," he said.

El Nino

From Page 1A

toward wetter than average conditions in September, said South Dakota state climatologist Dennis Today in a news release,

The highest likelihood focused over the southwest, expanding eastward into the Great Plains, said Today, an SDSU Extension climate specialist.

"This area also reaches just into the southern counties of South Dakota," he said. "Based on historical data from recent decades, during historical El Nino

events, September does not show a strong tendency toward either wetter or drier conditions."

Looking ahead to the months of September, October and November, the area forecast to be cooler than average is restricted to the Southern Plains, Today said.

"Much of the Northern Plains and Midwest region, including South Dakota, is projected to have equal chances of temperatures that are near above, below or near average," he said.

Looking down the line, El Nino looks to create a warmer and drier winter, said Illinois state climatologist Jim Angel during a

national conference call.

"El Nino will probably stay strong at the top of the charts all the way through December, January and February, and then taper off," he said. "But it still stays at about 70 percent chance in March, April and May."

That translates into a warmer, drier winter, Angel said.

"For December, January and February, during the core winter months, there is an increased chance of above average temperatures through the central United States," he said.

"El Nino tends to reduce winter snowfall in some cases, so that might be

another side effect of El Nino this winter is decreased snow fall."

The effect looks to remain in the spring, Angel said.

"For the March, April, May forecast for us in the Central region, the key thing is slightly increased chances of above average temperatures across the northern tier (of states)," he said.

So what is the impact on the upcoming harvest?

The outlook for fall season precipitation continues to show wetter than average conditions from the Southwest to Mississippi River and Tennessee River valleys, Today said.

"This region includes

South Dakota, which is representative of several long-range climate computer models," he said.

Overall, the chances of wetter than average conditions during corn and soybean harvest are increasing, particularly in southern South Dakota.

"It may be wise to consider marketing options and plans for logistics in fall harvest season if this long-range outlook verifies," Edwards said.

The outlook for winter 2015-2016 is projected to be warmer than average across the northern states. At this time, Edwards said there is no particular leaning wet or

dry for South Dakota in the winter season outlook.

However, you can't assume one El Nino will act like another, Angel said. He pointed to two extreme examples where El Nino wasn't the whole story.

"We're looking at the wintertime departure during 1997-98, when the winter was so mild that people were playing golf in Chicago in January," he said. "Then, you had 2009-2010 that was much colder than average."

For more information from SDSU Extension, visit online at iGrow.org.

Follow @RDockendorf on Twitter.

Blaha

From Page 1A

moving onto campus today (Friday) for the start of next week's classes, said USD Vice President Kim Grieve.

"Brant will be remembered as an intelligent, fun and caring person who loved his family and USD," said Grieve, who serves as dean of students.

Blaha graduated from Avon High School in 2014. He was active in chorus, football and excelled in cross country. He also was very active with the Science Fair, receiving honors in Arizona. He was an honor student at Avon High School.

Blaha's death has been a shock to the school and community, said Avon superintendent Tom Culver. "Brant was a great kid.

He always had a smile on his face and loved to joke around," Culver said. "Everyone in the community will really miss him."

The Avon schools are not in session this morning (Friday) so students and staff can attend the funeral, Culver said. The funeral Mass will be held at 10:30 a.m. preceded by a 9:30 a.m. Rosary, at the Assumption Catholic Church in Dante.

Plans are already under way to honor Blaha, Culver said. "His classmates are going to plant a tree at our football field complex in his memory," the superintendent said.

Blaha was part of a group of five swimmers who decided Sunday afternoon to cross the Missouri River at a popular spot west of Elk Point. The other four swimmers safely made it across the river, but Blaha became

separated from them and was apparently swept downstream. He wasn't wearing a lifejacket.

The search effort was launched immediately and included sonar devices, search dogs and an airplane. In addition, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers voluntarily lowered the river levels about one foot to aid the search.

The rescue crews battled inclement weather that included unseasonably cool temperatures, rainfall, overcast skies and strong winds which gusted to 40 miles per hour.

In addition, authorities were faced with covering a large search area and the possibility of rugged and unpredictable waters.

Blaha's body was located Wednesday, but authorities continued to withhold the teenager's name. On Thurs-

day, the Sanford Health Pathology's office confirmed the young man's identity.

Grieve sent a notice to the USD community upon confirmation of Blaha's death.

"It is with great sadness, I am informing you that Brant Blaha, a USD Honors student studying History Education, passed away this week," she wrote. "Brant's father wanted to thank all of the students and staff who have offered their support and prayers during this time. A memorial service will be planned on campus to honor Brant's life soon."

As a member of the Honors Program, Blaha was part of a living learning community that took courses together, Grieve said.

However, the young man was known in the larger campus community, Grieve said. USD students contacted uni-

versity officials immediately after Blaha became missing.

"We've offered counseling to students both as a group and individually since last Sunday," Grieve said. "Vermillion is a small community, and (his death) is devastating to us."

Blaha's death provides a tragic and powerful learning lesson for other USD students, Grieve said. The tragedy will be incorporated in USD's safety discussions for its students.

"We'll discuss the Missouri River because a lot of our students go to the beach, and (the river) can be so dangerous," she said.

During media interviews, Union County Sheriff Dan Limoges said this week wasn't the first time his office has needed to search for missing persons in the Missouri River.

The sheriff urged the pub-

lic to show extreme caution — including the wearing of a life jacket — when going on or near the river.

The Missouri River can exhibit treacherous conditions, particularly during poor weather conditions, Limoges said.

"The river is relentless, and it's not always very giving," he told one media outlet.

Assisting in this week's search were South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks; Nebraska Game and Parks; Ponca (Nebraska) Fire and Rescue; Yankton County Search and Rescue; the Union County sheriff's personnel and Union County emergency management.

Blaha's obituary can be found on page 3A of today's *Press & Dakotan*.

Follow @RDockendorf on Twitter.

Clerk

From Page 1A

"As some of you may know, I worked as the City Clerk for the City of Crofton for many years. During this time, I had numerous responsibilities, including the management of various financial accounts.

"Over the course of the last few years, I have had various personal matters come up that resulted in financial stress on me and my family. As a result of that stress, I misappropriated monies that I had access to. "While my personal problems were the cause, this is absolutely no excuse for my transgressions. The City trusted me. The City placed responsibility in me. I failed the City and its citizens."

In response, Interim City Manager Hendrix issued a press release to the *Press & Dakotan* on behalf of the Crofton City Council. The press release included comments from two council members.

"We respect the courage that it must have taken for her to come forward

and accept responsibility," Councilman Steve Kuehler said. "We hope that this will be the beginning of a healing process for the entire community."

Councilman Tom Allen agreed. "We are going to keep putting things in order and doing what's right for the people of Crofton," he said.

In upcoming weeks, the city plans to work with Foxhoven on a plan for full restitution, Charlie Hendrix said. The city's investigative team is currently calculating a correct sum of monies to be repaid by Foxhoven.

In July, the city formed the special investigative team to inspect irregularities with regards to city business operations, Hendrix said. The review team includes persons with law enforcement and legal backgrounds as well as government and accounting knowledge, she said.

The city isn't releasing the investigative team members' names at this time, Hendrix said. The action was taken because members are willing to serve for little or no pay on the condition of anonymity, she said.

The committee has

concentrated on four areas of concern:

- bank accounts;
- general accounting practices;
- utility payments;
- payroll and time keeping.

At its Aug. 3 regular meeting, the council passed a number of policy changes in the handling of city operations. The changes include the separation of certain financial duties and assigning them to different individuals.

The policy statement states the city manager, not the city clerk, shall be the city treasurer. The city manager/city treasurer shall not be a signer on any city bank account or the like.

At the meeting, Interim City Manager Hendrix released some preliminary findings but not as much as she originally intended.

In anticipation of a full review of city operations, Mayor Wendell Strom sought a mayor pro tem. The council considered the request and voted to appoint Michael Guenther mayor pro tem only for purposes of signing checks.

The mayor didn't want it look as if he was hindering the investigation in any way,

Charlie Hendrix said at the time.

"This was done to avoid any appearance of impropriety during the investigation," she said. "In addition, one employee was removed from any financial responsibilities pending the investigation."

All bookkeeping and accounting records are being pulled from storage, separated and reviewed.

In addition, the city will hold a "stake holders" meeting as part of its new policy statements, Charlie Hendrix said.

"It shall be the best practice of the City Council and mayor to hold a 'stake

holders' meeting on at least an annual basis," the policy says. "At the pleasure and in lieu of the mayor and City Council, the city manager or administrator may hold such a meeting."

Most recently, the council held a special meeting Aug. 13. At one point during the meeting, the council went into executive session for a number of reasons, the Crofton Journal reported.

Those reasons for the executive session included the interest of the public and for the purposes and discussion of investigative procedures regarding allegations of criminal misconduct

24 HR
EXPRESS
LAUNDROMAT

2020 Elm St
- Behind Walgreens

Laundry Machines to fit
any size load and budget

Relax at Diggers Casino & Bar Next Door
While You Wash & Dry

DIGGERS

Wewant
to make you
a loan!

\$100 - \$3000

GENTRY FINANCE

228 Capital • Yankton
605-665-7955

CONVENIENT LOAN

1818 Broadway Suite D-1 • Yankton
605-665-1640