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U.S. oil sites believed vulnerable to terrorists

By Julia C. Martinez

Inquirer Staff Writer

Foreign terrorists have been unable or unwilling to strike targets on U.S. soil, but one terrorism expert believes the nation's oil and gas facilities may be vulnerable to attack.

Since tensions heightened between the United States and Iraq in August, threats have been made against U.S. oil facilities, said Edward V. Badolato, former deputy assistant secretary of the US. Department of Energy, who now heads Contingency Management Services Inc. in Fairfax, Va., which helps energy companies improve their security.

"In the past several months there has been an increase in the perception that there are, if not Iraqi agents, Iraqi sympathizers with an Iraqi cause already in the United States or just a plane ride away," Badolato said.

"They have not been tracked down and identified but there have been calls and threats to oil facilities," he said.

About two weeks ago, for instance, a map was found on a New York City subway annotated with targets that included Consolidated Edison Co. Inc. Police and federal authorities have not identified anyone in connection with the map, which they believe is not a hoax, according to Joseph A. Valiquette, an FBI spokesman in New York.

Other threats have involved the trans-Alaska oil pipeline, prompting security to be upgraded along the pipeline route.

The 800-mile pipeline, running from Prudhoe Bay to Valdez, is considered to be of critical strategic importance to the nation's infrastructure according to Nestor Michnyak, a spokesman for the FBI, whose counter-terrorism unit is responsible for investigating allegations or acts of terrorism in the United States.

Soon after Iraq's Aug. 2 invasion of Kuwait, the FBI ordered its field offices to be on alert for signs of terrorist activity, he said.

The U.S. Department of Energy has also increased its security at the nation's strategic petroleum reserve and on government nuclear weapons facilities since the invasion of Kuwait said Tim Tomastik, a spokesman for the Department of Energy's Office of Safeguards and Securities.

Alaska provides a quarter of the nation's oil supply, and the Alaska pipeline carries two million barrels of crude a day from oil fields that supply major U.S. refineries on the West Coast and near the Gulf of Mexico.

Badolato said bombing the pipe line itself would cause minor disruptions that could be repaired in a few days or weeks. More critical would be damage to a key component such as an electric power station, which could cause much longer disruptions. Security has been beefed up around such components, pipeline officials said.

Until now, most acts of terrorism on U.S. soil have been carried out by home-grown terrorists, people Badolato described as "radical environmentalists ... and white supremacists."

The United States averages about three dozen terrorist attacks annually against energy facilities, Badolato said: 75 percent of those are against electric-power facilities.

These acts involve cutting power lines, drilling holes in gas pipelines and other acts of sabotage that Badolato declined to discuss, citing national security reasons. In most, if not all cases, he said, the activity could be disruptive to a major city.

But recent evidence suggests that foreign terrorists have penetrated U.S. borders and pinpointed military and other installations for possible attack.

In November, the FBI arrested a man they identified as a Palestinian from Jordan on charges of making threats against U.S. officials, including President Bush and Secretary of State James A. Baker 3d. The charges against Jamal Mohamed Warrayat of Rutherford, N.J., also included conspiring to damage military installations in North Carolina and Texas.

### **Military targets**

Warrayat allegedly told an FBI undercover agent that he had drawings and diagrams of military targets.

He is being held without bail, according to Richard Lavinthal, spokesman for the U.S. Attorney's Office in Newark, N.J.

And authorities are still investigating the discovery of the map in New York, which noted industrial targets, including Con Ed. which supplies electricity to New York City and nearby areas.

The FBI's Valiquette said the sites were supposedly targeted for New Year's Eve. A spokeswoman for Con Ed said the company was cooperating with the investigation.

"This is the kind of thing we have to be careful about." Badolato said.

Terrorists might disrupt a major pipeline or other vital facility to pay back the United States for what they feel is aggression "and to deal in state-sponsored terrorism, which the terrorists say is an asset they possess." Badolato said.

So far, foreign terrorists have concentrated on targets abroad that are considered easier, "much softer to go after," he said. Targets on U.S. soil were considered to be virtually impenetrable.

But Badolato believes luck has played a part in keeping terrorists at bay thus far. "It would be foolish not to take prudent precautionary measures to protect our energy infrastructure," he said.

Not enough done

He believes oil companies have not done enough to guard against a possible strike.

"They're interested more in people stealing oil and in white-collar crimes," Badolato said.

"The typical U.S. refinery probably has a couple of guards and a couple of dogs patrolling a big arm" said Michael C. Lynch, an analyst with Washington International Energy Group. But Lynch concedes that no one really knows what precautions are taken because oil companies are reluctant to discuss security.

"We never talk about security because, if you do, you don't have any," said Les Rogers, spokesman for Exxon Corp., the world's largest oil company.

"It's too sensitive an issue." agreed Paul Durkin, spokesman for Sun Co. of Radnor, which has four refineries in the United States and one in Puerto Rico. Steven J. Shapiro, vice president for corporate planning for Atlantic Richfield Co., said his company considered a terrorist attack unlikely

Arco and British Petroleum Co. PLC are the two major oil companies with extensive oil assets in Alaska. Arco is the biggest oil marketer of Alaskan oil on the West Coast.

"Obviously, if there is any disruption in Alaska we would have to find an alternative source of crude oil to satisfy our markets." Shapiro said. "We're talking of a scenario we consider unlikely, but we should easily replace the supply."

Because oil fields are spread over large expanses, with multiple producing areas, they would be difficult to damage, he said. "Even if wells were disturbed, it wouldn't have any significant impact." Shapiro said.

As for possible sabotage, he said, most refineries are isolated and secured so that access is tightly controlled.

Nevertheless, Badolato believes companies must do more to understand their vulnerabilities and avoid possible damage.

He said they can take such precautions as controlling access even more, increasing internal security, and reviewing vital components of the refinery process to ensure that there are adequate observation and detection capabilities.

The pipeline's deployment capabilities have been tested since August, and its security systems have been put on special alert.

"It is a model of security for this type of industry - very sophisticated, with armed guards and tight security clearance," Badolato said.

Some facilities have good plan. The Strategic Petroleum Reserve, the government emergency oil stockpile located in underground salt domes in Louisiana and Texas. - is believed to have one of the best petroleum storage and pipeline-security programs in the world.