

Case 49: Tampa

John Mueller

March 16, 2014

In 2011, Sami Osmakac, 25 years of age and a naturalized citizen of Albanian descent from Kosovo, went in to a Tampa, Florida, store shopping for al-Qaeda flags. Suspicious of this bizarre request, the Muslim owner hired Osmakac so that he and the authorities could keep an eye on him. When Osmakac later asked about purchasing weapons, the owner put him on to an FBI agent who played responsive to requests for such items as an AK-47 machine gun, a Uzi submachine gun, high capacity magazines, grenades, an explosive belt, and three car bombs, though demurring a bit on the last by saying he would only be able to supply one car bomb.

A disturbed and angry hyper-Muslim hothead who had been kicked out of two local mosques and had head-butted an infidel outside a Lady Gaga concert, Osmakac was scarcely quiet about his radical views though, as Nicole Spaetzel observes, no one reported him to the authorities until he sought to buy his al-Qaeda flag.

Osmakac was arrested in early 2012 when he purchased and took possession of some of his FBI-supplied weapons. By that time, he had posted a video online in which he said he planned to “bring terror to his victim’s hearts” and to “crush the whole economy” by attacking a large crowd, taking hostages, demanding ransom, and then dying “the Muslim way.” Eventually, he thought he could bomb nightclubs, the Sheriff’s Office, and several businesses, as well as six connecting bridges thereby cutting off Tampa residents from their food supply and from access to their jobs. He also told the FBI operative that he wanted to attack an Army base, but decided that, unlike his other targets, that would be too difficult. During his hostage-taking exercise he planned to make demands of the “disbelievers of Islam,” although, notes Spaetzel, he never revealed what it was he planned to demand.

Osmakac was a “lone wolf” in that he had no real accomplices, but a true lone wolf would not communicate with anybody about his plans and would certainly not publicize them and his outrage on the internet—or for that matter seek to purchase an al-Qaeda flag. Spaetzel notes that he “was highly motivated to carry out an attack” and speculates that “if he had made contact with a legitimate weapons dealer, he might have been successful.” However, that task is not an easy one. As Trevor Aaronson has pointed out, “there has not been a single would-be terrorist in the United States who has become operational through a chance meeting with someone able to provide the means for a terrorist attack.”¹

¹ Trevor Aaronson, *The Terror Factory*. Brooklyn, NY: Ig Publishing, 2013, 206-07; also 29-30, 55.

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Nicole Spaetzel

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1. Overview

Police arrested a 25-year-old naturalized American citizen on January 7, 2012, after he bought explosive devices and firearms from an undercover federal agent.¹ The man, Sami Osmakac, was born in Kosovo, and lived there until his family immigrated to the United States in 2000.² He was raised Muslim but, according to his family, did not become “deeply religious” and radicalized until his early twenties.³ Osmakac planned to use the weapons to attack Americans at various locations around Tampa, Florida. His self-proclaimed motive, which he revealed in an eight-minute long online video, was to “bring terror to victim’s hearts.”⁴

Osmakac came to the attention of federal authorities in September of 2011 after a local Muslim storeowner in Tampa reported to them that Osmakac had visited his store looking for al-Qaeda flags. The storeowner hired Osmakac as an employee so authorities could observe Osmakac with audio and video tape. At some point during his employment, Osmakac became comfortable with the storeowner, and approached the storeowner for help acquiring firearms and explosives for an attack. The storeowner put him in contact with an undercover FBI agent. In December of 2011, Osmakac met with the undercover agent for the first time and told him that he wanted to buy an AK-47 style machine gun, Uzi submachine guns, high capacity magazines, grenades and an explosive belt.⁵

In a second meeting, Osmakac gave the agent five hundred dollars as a down payment for the weapons and also asked for car bombs for three different vehicles that could be detonated remotely. Later, on January 1, 2012, he told the undercover agent that he planned to bomb nightclubs, an operations center for the Hillsborough County Sheriff’s Officer, and another unidentified business in Tampa.⁶

Police arrested Sami Osmakac on January 7, 2012 after he received the weapons from the undercover agent and placed them in his car. He was charged with one count of attempted use of a weapon of mass destruction.⁷ If convicted he could face life in prison. Osmakac was scheduled to face trial beginning on October 21, 2013. However, the trial was delayed so Osmakac can undergo an independent psychiatric assessment to determine if he is competent to stand trial.⁸

¹ Tamara Lush, “Feds Uncover Tampa Terrorism Plot,” WOKV.com, January 9, 2012.

² Nebi Qena, and Tamara Lush, “Suspected Tampa Terror Suspect Sami Osmakac Met Radical Islamists in Kosovo,” WPTV.com, January 11, 2012.

³ Qena and Lush, “Suspected Tampa Terror Suspect.”

⁴ Lush, “Feds Uncover Tampa Terrorism Plot.”

⁵ Lush, “Feds Uncover Tampa Terrorism Plot.”

⁶ Lush, “Feds Uncover Tampa Terrorism Plot.”

⁷ “Florida Resident Charged with Plotting to Bomb Locations in Tampa,” FBI.gov, January 9, 2012.

⁸ Patty Ryan, “Osmakac Terrorism Trial Delayed over Competency Question,” TampaBay.com, October 8, 2013.

2. Nature of the adversary

Sami Osmakac was born in the village of Lubizde, Kosovo, in the former Yugoslavia, located near the Cursed Mountains that divide Kosovo from Albania. In Kosovo, he lived in a house with his immediate family and the families of his two uncles.⁹ The families were not very wealthy and suffered from ethnic intolerance in the country as well as the ongoing war. Osmakac and his family fled to present-day Croatia and Bosnia and then to Germany.¹⁰ In 2000, when Sami Osmakac was thirteen, his family immigrated to the United States.¹¹

The family moved to Pinellas Park, Florida, opening a bakery in St. Petersburg called Balkan Food Store and Bakery.¹² The family still lives in the same house and operates the bakery. Osmakac attended at least two different Tampa-area high schools, but it is unclear if he graduated.¹³ At Pinellas Park High School, he got into a fight with other students and ended up punching a teacher who was trying to separate the students. Osmakac was charged with battery on a school board official.¹⁴ There is no record whether the school followed through with the charges. Classmates and high school acquaintances say that he mostly kept to himself. They also remembered that he enjoyed rap music and would rap songs about bombs and killing people in songs he made with a friend.¹⁵ A classmate at Lakewood High School, Alan Stoking, recalled Osmakac as, “one of those government rebel types. All of our conversations consisted of him talking about how stupid everybody at the school was. Not just the students, but the teachers, the people who financed institutions like it.”¹⁶

Osmakac’s aunt described him as a “quiet and fun boy” when he was a child,¹⁷ observing that he came from a “very good family.”¹⁸ His aunt still lives in Kosovo.¹⁹ She said his parents regularly sent money from the United States to their relatives who had returned to Kosovo after the 1999 war ended.²⁰ Osmakac and his immediate family also made summer trips to Kosovo after the country declared its independence from Serbia in 2008.²¹ She said the allegations against her nephew shocked her: “It felt very strange to hear what he was being accused of. I don’t believe he did what they accuse him of doing. There was no better kid around here.”²²

⁹ “Terror Plot Suspect Was a Loner Who Made up Rap Songs about Bombs and Grew More Radical as He Got Older,” *Mail Online*. Dailymail.co.uk, January 15, 2012.

¹⁰ “Terror Plot Suspect Was a Loner.”

¹¹ Lush, “Feds Uncover Tampa Terrorism Plot.”

¹² Steven Hoffer, “Florida Terrorism Plot: Feds Charge Ex-Kosovo Man Sami Osmakac For Attempted Terror Plan,” *TheHuffingtonPost.com*, January 9, 2012.

¹³ Qena and Lush, “Suspected Tampa Terror Suspect.”

¹⁴ Qena and Lush, “Suspected Tampa Terror Suspect.”

¹⁵ “Terror Plot Suspect Was a Loner.”

¹⁶ “Terror Plot Suspect Was a Loner.”

¹⁷ “Terror Plot Suspect Was a Loner.”

¹⁸ “Family: Tampa Terror Suspect ‘Quiet and Fun,’” *CBSNews.com*, January 10, 2012.

¹⁹ Qena and Lush, “Suspected Tampa Terror Suspect.”

²⁰ “Terror Plot Suspect Was a Loner.”

²¹ “Terror Plot Suspect Was a Loner.”

²² “Family: Tampa Terror Suspect ‘Quiet and Fun.’”

Osmakac was raised Muslim, but his aunt noted that he did not grow deeply religious until his early twenties. He had grown a beard, donned religious garments and met with two devout Muslims from Albania and Bosnia on his visits.²³ His aunt also said Osmakac had visited Kosovo in October of 2011, but she did not know he was there and he did not visit or contact her. She only learned he was there from neighbors.²⁴

Back in the United States, Osmakac had started worshipping at a local mosque. However, he was quickly banned from the two local mosques at which he participated. He was banned from the first mosque in November of 2010 after he and another man engaged in a heated discussion at the mosque. The other man was an American convert to Islam and Osmakac was questioning his devotion. The American convert claimed that Osmakac was the one that approached him, initiated the argument and “radicalized things.”²⁵

Osmakac ostracized himself from the other local mosque and local Muslims in general when he approached the executive director of the Council on American-Islamic Relations in Tampa in the summer of 2011 and called the organization an “infidel organization.” The director said that, “It was very clear he was very disturbed very angry and very misguided about the Islamic faith. He was very, very ignorant of Islam. He didn't know Arabic or anything about basic Islamic teachings about promoting peace.”²⁶ He also added that Osmakac did not appear to be a member of any other local mosque. Lastly, the director said that he received numerous calls from members of the local Islamic community that were concerned with Osmakac's radical views and behavior, and he advised them to contact the police. However, no one contacted the police until the storeowner that contacted the authorities after Osmakac entered his store looking for al-Qaeda flags.

Radical behavior that the Tampa-area Islamic community cited as alarming included an argument that Osmakac started outside of a Lady Gaga concert in downtown Tampa. The police report said that anti-gay Christian protestors outside the concert saw Osmakac drive by in a truck and he stood out to them because he was wearing what appeared to be traditional Middle-eastern attire with a small cloth on his head. The protestors said after they watched the man drive his truck past them multiple times, they began to criticize the Islamic faith. The protestors then said that the man parked his car, approached them and began to insult the protestors back. However, Osmakac did not stop at verbally attacking the protestors. He head butted one of the men leaving the protestor with a bloody mouth. Osmakac was charged with battery. The case has not been resolved.²⁷

Shortly after that altercation in April of 2011 with the protestors, Osmakac posted a video online entitled, “Convert to Islam NOW! To all Atheist Christian

²³ “Terror Plot Suspect Was a Loner.”

²⁴ Qena and Lush, “Suspected Tampa Terror Suspect.”

²⁵ Qena and Lush, “Suspected Tampa Terror Suspect.”

²⁶ Hoffer, “Florida Terrorism Plot.”

²⁷ Hoffer, “Florida Terrorism Plot.”

(Non-Muslims).”²⁸ The video, as the name suggests, looked to convince non-Muslims to convert to the Islamic faith. Osmakac threatened unspecified consequences if they did not.

Osmakac appears in a number of other online videos.²⁹ The videos, all filmed before his arrest, show him speaking out against Christians, Jews, and other non-believers of Islam. He also uses the videos to warn Muslims not to follow the example of non-believers. In these videos, he seems highly motivated to convert non-believers to Islam and to encourage Muslims to stay true to Allah.

3. Motivation

Osmakac expressed his motivation for his planned terror attacks in an eight-minute long video that he posted online before he was arrested. The video is unavailable online to the public, but authorities described the video in detail. According to authorities, in the video, Osmakac described his motive was to “bring terror to his victim’s hearts.”³⁰ The video shows him sitting on the floor with a pistol in his hand and an AK-47 behind him. He says that Muslim blood was more valuable than that of people who do not believe in Islam, and he wanted payback for the wrong that was done to Muslims. He never identifies a specific event or “wrong” that he is looking to avenge.

There does not appear to be any particular event that set Osmakac off. Instead, he seemed to be gradually radicalized after exposure to Islamic extremists in Kosovo. He appears to have been extremely self-motivated as well. Aside from approaching the undercover agent for weapons, Osmakac planned his terror plots on his own and intended to carry them out by himself.

4. Goals

Osmakac came to the attention of federal authorities in September of 2011 after a local Muslim storeowner in Tampa reported to them that Osmakac had visited his store looking for al-Qaeda flags. The storeowner hired Osmakac as an employee so authorities could observe Osmakac with audio and video tape. At some point during his employment, Osmakac became comfortable with the storeowner, and approached the storeowner for help acquiring firearms and explosives for an attack. The storeowner put him in contact with an undercover FBI agent.³¹ In December of 2011, Osmakac met with the undercover agent for the first time and revealed the goals and means of his terror plot to the agent.

His long-term goal was to bring justice to non-Muslims and Americans because he believed they had harmed Muslims. His immediate goal was to bring justice by causing destruction around the Tampa area. He planned to bomb nightclubs, an operations center for the Hillsborough County Sheriff’s Office, and other unspecified businesses. He planned to detonate car bombs with a remote

²⁸ “Moment Terror Suspect, 25, Arrested over ‘bomb Plot’ in Florida Was Caught on Camera Brawling with Christian Protesters,” *Dailymail.co.uk*, January 10, 2012.

²⁹ Gregg Burrage, “Police Say Terror Suspect Sami Osmakac Appears in Online Video,” *WFTS*, January 9, 2012.

³⁰ Lush, “Feds Uncover Tampa Terrorism Plot.”

³¹ Lush, “Feds Uncover Tampa Terrorism Plot.”

control, and also planned to wear an explosive belt and take hostages during the aftermath of the car bombs. He would use the hostages and explosive belt to demand something from the “disbelievers of Islam.” There is no indication of what exactly he planned to demand. He also wanted to “crush the whole economy.”³² He wanted to blow up the bridges that connect the city of Tampa to the connecting counties. There are six major bridges in the Tampa area, but Osmakac never specified which bridges or how many bridges he planned to bomb.

5. Plans for violence

Sami Osmakac envisioned large-scale destruction when he planned his terror plot. He planned to “crush the whole economy,”³³ attack a large crowd,³⁴ take hostages, demand ransom, and then “die the Muslim way.”³⁵ There is no account of whether he was planning his terror plot already when he entered the store in Tampa in September 2011 looking for al-Qaeda flags. After this visit, the storeowner hired Osmakac so that federal officials could monitor Osmakac’s conversations. During his conversations with the storeowner, Osmakac revealed he was thinking of a plan to avenge the wrong done to Muslims and asked that the storeowner put him in contact with someone that would be able to supply him with firearms and explosives for his attack. The storeowner gave him the name of an undercover FBI agent posing as a weapons dealer.³⁶

On December 21, 2011, Osmakac met with the undercover agent and asked to buy an AK-47 style machine gun, Uzi submachine gun, high capacity magazines, grenades, and an explosive belt. He also asked the undercover agent to supply him with car bombs for three different vehicles. The undercover agent told him that he could only supply him with one car bomb. In their next meeting, Osmakac gave the undercover agent a down payment of five hundred dollars for the weapons.³⁷

On January 1, 2012, Osmakac revealed to the undercover agent in a meeting that he planned to bomb nightclubs, an operations center for the Hillsborough County Sheriff’s Office and another unspecified business in Tampa. He planned to detonate the car bombs outside of his targeted buildings with a remote control. In the aftermath of the explosions, Osmakac planned to use the other weapons for a further attack and take hostages while wearing the explosive belt. He planned to use the hostages to demand something from the “disbelievers of Islam,” although he never revealed what exactly he planned to demand. He told the undercover agent that he initially wanted to attack the Army but knew it would be too difficult to get past the security at the bases.³⁸

³² Lush, “Feds Uncover Tampa Terrorism Plot.”

³³ Lush, “Feds Uncover Tampa Terrorism Plot.”

³⁴ Carol Cratty, and Alan Duke, “Kosovo Native Plotted Bombings, Bloodshed in Tampa, Feds Say,” CNN.com, Cable News Network, January 9, 2012.

³⁵ Lush, “Feds Uncover Tampa Terrorism Plot.”

³⁶ Lush, “Feds Uncover Tampa Terrorism Plot.”

³⁷ Lush, “Feds Uncover Tampa Terrorism Plot.”

³⁸ Lush, “Feds Uncover Tampa Terrorism Plot.”

Along with the car bombs placed at the selected buildings, Osmakac also wanted to “crush the whole economy,” by blowing up the bridges that connect Tampa to the surrounding counties. There are six major bridges connecting the Tampa area to the surrounding counties, but Osmakac never specified which bridges or how many bridges he planned to bomb. He believed that by blowing up the bridges, there would be no way for the people to get food and no one would be able to travel to their jobs. During the last meeting before his arrest, the undercover agent suggested that there was still time for Osmakac to change his mind and abandon his plans. His response was, “We all have to die, so why not die the Islamic way?”³⁹

On January 7, 2012, the police arrested Osmakac after he took the weapons from the undercover agent and placed them in his car.⁴⁰ Officials believed he planned to use the weapons that night. Since the weapons he obtained from the undercover agent were inoperable, Osmakac would have failed in carrying out his attack. The police also believed that he had narrowed the scope of his attack to an Irish bar in South Tampa.⁴¹ They also believed that he planned to set off the car bomb, return to a local hotel room for the other weapons, and then begin the second part of his plan to take hostages.⁴²

Earlier in the day, before his arrest, Osmakac had posted a video online. In the video, he detailed his motivations and plans for violence. The video shows Osmakac sitting on the floor with a pistol in his hand and an AK-47 behind him. He tells the camera that he wishes to “bring terror to his victim’s hearts.”⁴³ He says that Muslim blood was more valuable than that of people who do not believe in Islam and he wanted payback for the unspecified “wrongs” that were done to Muslims. Osmakac planned to die a Muslim once he had obtained what he wanted in exchange for the hostages. He told the undercover agent, “Once I have this...they can take me away in five million pieces.”⁴⁴ Osmakac was highly motivated to carry out an attack, and if he had made contact with a legitimate weapons dealer, he might have been successful.

Osmakac was charged with one count of attempted use of a weapon of mass destruction.⁴⁵ If convicted he could face life in prison. He was scheduled to face trial beginning on October 21, 2013. However, the trial was delayed so Osmakac could undergo an independent psychiatric assessment to determine if he is competent to stand trial.⁴⁶ A court-appointed psychiatrist had already determined that Osmakac was fit to stand trial, but the defense argued for a

³⁹ Lush, “Feds Uncover Tampa Terrorism Plot.”

⁴⁰ Lush, “Feds Uncover Tampa Terrorism Plot.”

⁴¹ Cratty and Duke, “Kosovo Native Plotted Bombings, Bloodshed in Tampa, Feds Say.”

⁴² Cratty and Duke, “Kosovo Native Plotted Bombings, Bloodshed in Tampa, Feds Say.”

⁴³ Lush, “Feds Uncover Tampa Terrorism Plot.”

⁴⁴ Mike Levine, “Suspected Islamic Extremist Arrested in Alleged Florida Bomb Plot,” *Fox News*, Foxnews.com, January 9, 2012.

⁴⁵ “Florida Resident Charged with Plotting to Bomb Locations in Tampa.”

⁴⁶ Ryan, “Osmakac Terrorism Trial Delayed over Competency Question.”

private analysis.⁴⁷ As of the beginning of October 2013, Osmakac was on his eighth attorney.

6. Role of informants

Police gave the majority of the credit for Osmakac's arrest and prevention of his terror attack to the Tampa area Muslim community. The head of the FBI's office in Tampa called their help "very significant."⁴⁸ The investigation started when the store owner, a member of the Muslim community, went to the police concerned with Osmakac's behavior after Osmakac visited his store looking for al-Qaeda flags.⁴⁹ The storeowner was not the first Muslim community member to become concerned with Osmakac, but he was the first to go to the police with concern. Several members of the Tampa-area Islamic community had approached the executive director of the Council on American-Islamic Relations with concern about Osmakac's extreme views.⁵⁰ They felt Osmakac was out of touch with the true meaning of Islam. The director encouraged all the concerned Muslims to talk to the police.⁵¹ However, they did not heed the director's advice.

All it took was one member of the community to speak up to the police for the investigation to begin. The police encouraged the Muslim storeowner to help them observe Osmakac by hiring Osmakac as an employee. The police used the storeowner as a confidential informant. With the help of the storeowner, police were able to listen to Osmakac's conversations with the storeowner on audio tape as well as watch his behavior on video tape starting from the date of his employment in the store in September 2011. There are no records of the storeowner contributing to Osmakac's terror plot through suggestions or encouragement. However, Osmakac clearly trusted the storeowner enough because at some point during his employment, Osmakac asked the storeowner if he could help him obtain weapons and explosives for his terror plot.⁵²

Under the direction of federal investigators, the storeowner put Osmakac in contact with an undercover FBI agent acting as a weapons dealer to whom Osmakac detailed his weapons demands and his various schemes. During the last meeting before his arrest, the undercover agent suggested that there was still time to change his mind and abandon his plans. In response, Osmakac told the undercover agent, "We all have to die, so why not die the Islamic way?"⁵³ The undercover agent most likely asked Osmakac this question as evidence that Osmakac was not being entrapped by the police but instead self-motivated. There is no evidence that the undercover agent contributed to the plot. Osmakac formed the attack on his own and intended to carry out the attack by himself.

Based on conversations with the storeowner and the undercover agent, and Osmakac's possession of the weapons in his car, police were able to charge

⁴⁷ "Sami Osmakac, Accused of Terrorism, Fit to Stand Trial," *WFTS*. Abcactionnews.com, February 21, 2013.

⁴⁸ Cratty and Duke, "Kosovo Native Plotted Bombings, Bloodshed in Tampa, Feds Say."

⁴⁹ Lush, "Feds Uncover Tampa Terrorism Plot."

⁵⁰ Hoffer, "Florida Terrorism Plot."

⁵¹ Hoffer, "Florida Terrorism Plot."

⁵² Lush, "Feds Uncover Tampa Terrorism Plot."

⁵³ Lush, "Feds Uncover Tampa Terrorism Plot."

Osmakac with one count of attempted use of a weapon of mass destruction.⁵⁴ Without the two informants, Osmakac might have never come to the attention of investigators until after he had committed his acts of violence. The storeowner was the key component in the prevention of Osmakac's attack. Without the storeowner, not only would police have had no warning, but also Osmakac might have encountered a weapons dealer that would have supplied him with all the weapons he wanted. Under those circumstances, it is likely that Osmakac would have successfully set off some degree of attack, although, it is doubtful he would have succeeded in accomplishing all his goals by himself.

The testimony of the undercover agent is an important part of the trial and evidence against Osmakac. His defense attorneys plan to prove that federal authorities entrapped Osmakac by setting him up with the weapons. They said they plan to focus on "the bureau's efforts to target people who are young, financially destitute, radical Islamists," and whether the undercover agent involved has "a history of taking to these people and convincing them to go ahead with their bombing and providing the materials."⁵⁵

The prosecution has asked that a number of precautions be taken to protect the identity of the undercover agent who is involved in a series of on-going investigations that could not be disclosed.⁵⁶ One of these precautions is a closed courtroom during the agent's testimony. The testimony would be completely off limits to spectators and media. Osmakac's family would be allowed to listen in from another room but would not be able to see the face of the agent. The defense claims that an open courtroom during the agent's testimony is important. They claim that the jurors need to be able to observe the demeanor of the agent for cues that he is lying about not entrapping Osmakac. Additionally, the defense argues that taking special precautions would give the illusion to the jurors that the agent is a special witness because he deserves special treatment. This special treatment might incline the jurors to believe the agent more.⁵⁷

7. Connections

After Osmakac's arrest, police announced that they were not able to identify ties to al-Qaeda or any other terrorist networks.⁵⁸ Police classified him as extremely "self-radicalized."⁵⁹ Based on conversations with the undercover agent who was acting as Osmakac's weapon dealer, police were able to determine that Osmakac was acting alone and intended to carry out the attacks on his own. Osmakac also insinuated that he planned to die a martyr. His language suggesting his martyrdom in the name of Islam speaks to Osmakac's extremist views and self-radicalization.

Although Osmakac had no concrete connections to terrorist cells of networks, investigators were able to trace his radicalization to meetings with

⁵⁴ "Florida Resident Charged with Plotting to Bomb Locations in Tampa."

⁵⁵ Elaine Silvestrini, "Secrecy Sought for FBI Agent in Tampa Terrorism Trial," TBO.com, Tampa Tribune, September 30, 2013.

⁵⁶ Silvestrini, "Secrecy Sought for FBI Agent in Tampa Terrorism Trial."

⁵⁷ Silvestrini, "Secrecy Sought for FBI Agent in Tampa Terrorism Trial."

⁵⁸ Cratty and Duke, "Kosovo Native Plotted Bombings, Bloodshed in Tampa, Feds Say."

⁵⁹ Cratty and Duke, "Kosovo Native Plotted Bombings, Bloodshed in Tampa, Feds Say."

Islamic extremists during his trips to Kosovo.⁶⁰ Kosovo authorities had been alerted by international agencies that Osmakac was linked to Islamist extremists and had discussed “issues in support of radical elements” with these individuals.⁶¹ There is no record of when Osmakac first met these individuals but his family did not begin visiting Kosovo until the summer of 2008.⁶² His last trip to Kosovo to meet with his extremist contacts was in October 2011.⁶³ There is no indication that these extremists planned to help him plan or carry out his attack.

8. Relation to the Muslim community

Osmakac was an outcast within the Tampa-area Muslim community. He was banned from two local mosques⁶⁴ and there is no indication that he was connected to any others.⁶⁵ The first banning stemmed from the altercation with an American-Muslim at the mosque.⁶⁶ Muslims viewed Osmakac’s views of Islam as extremist and incorrect. They expressed concerns about his views amongst themselves. Police identified Osmakac as a risk only after the store owner, a member of the Muslim community, stepped forward and reported Osmakac’s behavior as suspicious. The Muslim community’s alertness and negative experiences with Osmakac helped investigators to prevent a terror attack.

9. Depiction by the authorities

Authorities waited until two days after Osmakac’s arrest to alert the media of the terror plot. In those two days, authorities were able to eliminate the possibility that Osmakac was working with others. Authorities were able to avoid an alarmist press conference by verifying Osmakac was a lone wolf. At their press conference, authorities were able to tell the media that the threat was over and because they had been watching Osmakac, and were involved, they had the situation under control the whole time. The U.S. attorney for the Middle District of Florida said, “There was no real danger to the community once we got involved, because we knew we could handle the situation.”⁶⁷

Although authorities claimed that they had the situation under control, they did not pretend that there was no real threat of violence. The U.S. attorney said during the press conference, ““Was it real? It was very real.” The U.S. attorney also said that had the storeowner not contacted the police about Osmakac there would have been significant bloodshed because Osmakac might have acquired working weapons elsewhere.⁶⁸ During the press conference, authorities also outlined Osmakac’s plan to bomb a nightclub and then use his other weapons to take hostages.

⁶⁰ Qena and Lush, “Suspected Tampa Terror Suspect.”

⁶¹ Qena and Lush, “Suspected Tampa Terror Suspect.”

⁶² “Terror Plot Suspect Was a Loner.”

⁶³ Qena and Lush, “Suspected Tampa Terror Suspect.”

⁶⁴ Qena and Lush, “Suspected Tampa Terror Suspect.”

⁶⁵ Hoffer, “Florida Terrorism Plot.”

⁶⁶ Hoffer, “Florida Terrorism Plot.”

⁶⁷ Cratty, “Kosovo Native Plotted Bombings, Bloodshed in Tampa, Feds Say.”

⁶⁸ Cratty, “Kosovo Native Plotted Bombings, Bloodshed in Tampa, Feds Say.”

10. Coverage by the media

The media was unaware of any danger Osmakac posed until days after his arrest. Osmakac was arrested on a Saturday night and the police did not hold a press conference to alert the media until two days later on Monday. Because of the delayed information, most news sources had the same information delivered by law enforcement. Some news agencies interviewed family⁶⁹ and friends of Osmakac.⁷⁰ Other news outlets focused on his relationship to the Muslim community, which revealed he was an outcast.⁷¹

11. Policing costs

Surveillance of Sami Osmakac was extensive, but only lasted a few months. Starting in September of 2011, police observed Osmakac with audio and video tape with the help of a confidential informant—the store owner.⁷² There is no record of how the storeowner was paid for his role or if he was paid at all.

Starting in December of 2011 police involved a second informant. The second informant was an undercover employee of the FBI. There is no record of how much the undercover employee was paid but because he was named an employee, it can be inferred that he was being paid for his role.⁷³ The undercover agent supplied Osmakac with an AK-47 style machine gun, an Uzi submachine gun, a car bomb and an explosive belt.⁷⁴ The FBI had to obtain all these weapons and render them inoperable.

Osmakac was arrested in the beginning of January of 2012.⁷⁵ His arrest ended the investigation time, which lasted four months. Since the arrest, he has been incarcerated awaiting trial, which has been delayed twice. The most recent delay came in the beginning of October 2013 when the judge granted the defense a delay so Osmakac could undergo a private psychological analysis to determine if he is fit to stand trial.⁷⁶ If convicted, Osmakac faces life in prison.⁷⁷

12. Relevance of the internet

There is no indication that Osmakac used the internet to gain information to plan his attack. There is no evidence to suggest he was radicalized on the internet either. He did post videos online in which he warned people to convert to Islam and where he posted his video the day of his arrest that outlined his plans and motivations.⁷⁸ There is no indication however, that Osmakac commented or participated on other videos or websites.

⁶⁹ “Family: Tampa Terror Suspect ‘Quiet and Fun.’”

⁷⁰ “Terror Plot Suspect Was a Loner.”

⁷¹ Hoffer, “Florida Terrorism Plot.”

⁷² Lush, “Feds Uncover Tampa Terrorism Plot.”

⁷³ Silvestrini, “Secrecy Sought for FBI Agent in Tampa Terrorism Trial.”

⁷⁴ Lush, “Feds Uncover Tampa Terrorism Plot.”

⁷⁵ “Florida Resident Charged with Plotting to Bomb Locations in Tampa.”

⁷⁶ Ryan, “Osmakac Terrorism Trial Delayed over Competency Question.”

⁷⁷ “Florida Resident Charged with Plotting to Bomb Locations in Tampa.”

⁷⁸ Lush, “Feds Uncover Tampa Terrorism Plot.”

13. Are we safer?

If Sami Osmakac had visited a different store his name might have appeared in headlines that included the number of victims he had killed. A different storeowner might not have gone to the police with his concerns. Without the police watching Osmakac, he might have met with a weapons dealer willing to sell him all the car bombs, firearms, and explosives that he wanted. We are safer because the police were able to stop him but we are also safer because citizens are more alert to suspicious activity and willing to report behavior to the police.

Osmakac was a lone wolf terrorist in the sense that, although he sought help acquiring weapons, he was planning to use the weapons on his own. He had no connections to terrorist cells or networks. It is difficult for law enforcement to track down lone wolf terrorists because they are self-motivated and do not work within the known terrorist networks that authorities are already tracking. The case is a perfect example of how one citizen can prevent the injuries and deaths of countless other citizens at the hands of such terrorists.

14. Conclusions

The main question during Osmakac's trial will be whether the FBI entrapped him. Osmakac's defense attorneys plan to prove that federal authorities entrapped him by setting him up with the weapons. They said they plan to focus on "the bureau's efforts to target people who are young, financially destitute, radical Islamists," and whether the undercover agent involved has "a history of taking to these people and convincing them to go ahead with their bombing and providing the materials."⁷⁹ It is hard to believe that authorities targeted Osmakac: they were not involved until after the storeowner expressed his concerns with Osmakac's known extremist Islamic views. Further, authorities only monitored Osmakac's conversations and behavior. He initiated the search for weapons and his plans for terror. Only after he had his plan plotted in his head did the undercover agent come into contact with him. There are no records that the undercover agent pushed Osmakac to complete the plot. The undercover agent gave Osmakac a clear opportunity to back out of the plan and change his mind. He refused and insisted he wanted to die the "Islamic way."⁸⁰

Osmakac seemed intent on killing people with or without the help of the storeowner and undercover agent. If the undercover agent had not supplied the weapons he might have kept looking until he found the help and weapons he needed. He was convinced that he needed to avenge wrongs done to Muslims. Anyone that was not a Muslim was his target and had been the targets of his earlier attacks. These included not only the Christian protestor that he head butted and the audience to his online videos threatening people to convert to Islam.⁸¹ All the people in the Tampa-area were his targets because they were not Muslims. Osmakac said that the blood of non-believers was less valuable than that of Muslims.⁸²

⁷⁹ Silvestrini, "Secrecy Sought for FBI Agent in Tampa Terrorism Trial."

⁸⁰ Lush, "Feds Uncover Tampa Terrorism Plot."

⁸¹ "Moment Terror Suspect."

⁸² Lush, "Feds Uncover Tampa Terrorism Plot."

Osmakac also targeted fellow Muslims and sought to radicalize their views. He seemed to think that as an extremist, he was a better Muslim than others were, and he wanted Muslims to be more radical. Osmakac clearly believed violence to avenge the wrongs against Muslims and dying a martyr for this cause was the correct practice of Islam. Osmakac was prepared to die for his personal practice of Islam. He did not need the help of the undercover FBI agent, despite the claim from his ninth defense attorney, and he did not need the support from local Muslims.

Despite Osmakac's commitment to carrying out his attacks, one alert citizen ultimately stopped him. The case speaks volumes about the impact that citizens can have on the prevention of terrorist attacks. When citizens are alert and willing to come forward, they can prevent tragedy that law enforcement would otherwise have no way of tracking.

There was no media coverage of the storeowner because he acted as a confidential informant. However, we know that he and Osmakac shared a religion and that both were from the Tampa area. They presumably saw each other as neighbors. The storeowner might know Osmakac's family. Yet, he was still willing to go to the police and help them monitor Osmakac because he felt it was right and necessary. Hearing about his bravery and actions can inspire other citizens to remain alert and take suspicions to the police. This case highlights that when it comes to lone wolf terrorists, the involvement of brave citizens is as important as the involvement of law enforcement.