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The Goose Creek, South Carolina Traffic Stop

Report #17 in a NEFA series, "Target: America"
A NEFA report on the Goose Creek Traffic Stop
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[This report, originally released on December 8, 2008, was updated on December 20, 2008, to reflect that Mohamed was sentenced to 15 years in prison, and updated again on April 30, 2009 to reflect that Megahed was found not guilty of possessing explosives by a Florida jury on April 3, 2009. However, Megahed was re-arrested on April 6, 2009 by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials on immigration charges. He is currently awaiting a hearing.]

Case Overview:

At approximately 1730 hours, on August 4, 2007, Youssef Samir Megahed and Ahmed Abdellatif Sherif Mohamed were pulled over for speeding in Goose Creek, South Carolina, a small city located outside of Charleston, S.C. The police officer's suspicion was raised when he approached the car and observed the passenger (Megahed) disconnect wires from a laptop and quickly stow it in the back seat. Megahed and Mohamed, both engineering students at the University of South Florida (USF), provided inconsistent answers to the officer's basic questions about other stops they had made between Tampa and Goose Creek while on their trip. They were also unable to provide registration for the car, which belonged to Megahed's brother.

Megahed and Mohamed consented to allow the officers to search the car. In the trunk of the car, the officers discovered several sections of PVC pipe that contained a mixture of potassium nitrate and cat litter and approximately 20 feet of safety fuse. The subjects contended that they were driving to a beach in North Carolina to set off "sugar rockets" to celebrate Mohamed's birthday, which fell the next day, on August 5th.

The subjects were subsequently arrested in Goose Creek, South Carolina for transporting explosives across state lines without a license. A federal indictment against Megahed and Mohamed was filed in Florida on August 2007,

and the state of South Carolina dismissed its charges against Megahed and Mohamed in September 2007.¹

A subsequent investigation found that Mohamed had a history of interest in firearms, and had been researching the construction of improvised explosive devices on the Internet. He had also created an instructional video to demonstrate how to convert a remote control toy into a detonator, which he posted on YouTube.

Megahed also had a history of interest in firearms. Furthermore, records recovered from his family's home computer may also indicate his interest in improvised explosive devices and attacks on U.S. troops in the Middle East.

In March 2008, a federal court judge ruled that Mohamed would be tried separately on the charge that he created and posted the instructional video on YouTube.³ Mohamed pled guilty to providing material support to terrorists in a plea agreement that was submitted in June 2008.⁴

Subject Profiles:

Ahmed Abdellatif Sherif Mohamed, 26 at the time of his arrest, came to the U.S. from Cairo in January 2007, to begin work on his Ph.D. in civil engineering at the University of South Florida.⁵ He was also a teaching assistant.⁶

Mohamed was born in Kuwait and raised in Nasr City, a suburb of Cairo, Egypt.⁷ He holds an Egyptian passport.⁸ His family lives in Egypt.⁹

Mohamed's student visa application, which was submitted in October 2006, acknowledged a 2003 criminal arrest and four-month long detention in Egypt. His student visa was approved in Cairo despite the fact that he had been jailed on criminal charges.



Youssef Samir Megahed, left, and Ahmed Abdellatif Sherif Mohamed, right;
Tampa Bay Tribune

¹ Application for Search and Seizure Warrant, (M.D. FL.), No. 2:07-cr-01167-RSC, filed September 25, 2007.

³ Kevin Graham, *Mohamed to Have Two Trials, Megahed Bail Denied*, St. Petersburg Times, March 6, 2008.

⁴ U.S. v Ahmed Abdellatif Sherif Mohamed, (M.D. FL.), No. 8:07-Cr-342-T-23-MAP, Plea Agreement, filed June 13, 2008.

⁵ Audrey Hudson, *High Bonds Set in Pipe Bomb Case*, The Washington Times, August 8, 2007.

⁶ *U.S. Denies Egypt Access to Detained Students*, Reuters, September 1, 2007.

⁷ Meg Laughlin, *USF Student Faces Sentencing on Terror Charges Thursday*, St. Petersburg Times, December 15, 2008.

⁸ *Questions Remain About U South Florida Students with Pipe Bombs*, U-Wire, August 8, 2007.

⁹ Abbie Vansickle, *Family Rallies in Bomb Case*, St. Petersburg Times, August 10, 2007.

Mohamed's defense attorney suggested in a media interview that Mohamed had been arrested in Egypt for donating to a charity called Red Crescent and was picked up in a sweep.¹⁰ Red Crescent is a humanitarian organization similar to the Red Cross.

Youssef Samir Megahed, 21 at the time of his arrest, is an Egyptian national.

Megahed's family moved from Egypt to New York, then to California, and finally settled in Tampa, Florida when Megahed was approximately 11 years old. He was living with his family at the time of his arrest.¹¹ He has one older brother,

whose car Mohamed was driving at the time of the arrest, and a younger sister and a younger brother.¹²



Megahed, standing, and Mohamed, seated, at bail hearing on August 6, 2007, Associated Press

Megahed was a lawful permanent resident of the U.S., but his request for naturalization was refused in 2006 because of his extensive travel overseas, which prevented him from fulfilling the continuous residence requirement. Five of his overseas trips took him out of the country for more than six months at a time.¹³

Megahed's naturalization application stated that his father has real estate investments in Egypt. Neither of his parents work outside of their home in the U.S., according to court documents,¹⁴ however, newspaper reports state that Megahed's father is a retired civil engineer who currently operates a computer consulting business.¹⁵

¹⁰ Meg Laughlin, *USF Student Faces Sentencing on Terror Charges Thursday*, St. Petersburg Times, December 15, 2008.

¹¹ U.S. v. Youssef Samir Megahed, (M.D. FL.), No. 8:07-cr-00342-SDM-MAP, filed October 25, 2007.

¹² Valerie Kalfrin, *Family Says Son is Innocent of Explosives Charge*, Tampa Tribune, August 10, 2007.

¹³ U.S. v. Youssef Samir Megahed, (M.D. FL.), No. 8:07-cr-00342-SDM-MAP, filed October 25, 2007.

¹⁴ U.S. v. Youssef Samir Megahed, (M.D. FL.), No. 8:07-cr-00342-SDM-MAP, filed October 25, 2007.

¹⁵ Valerie Kalfrin, *Family Says Son is Innocent of Explosives Charge*, Tampa Tribune, August 10, 2007.

Megahed enrolled at the University of South Florida in 2004, to pursue a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering.¹⁶ At the time of his arrest, he had only one class to complete to fulfill his graduation requirements.¹⁷

According to a University of South Florida academic advisor, Megahed was very active in the USF Muslim Student Association.¹⁸

Megahed's first job, in 2007, was at a car dealership. He then went to work at a mental health clinic as a "technician", earning ten dollars an hour.¹⁹

Megahed had no prior criminal history.²⁰

Association:

Megahed and Mohamed met each other at school, according to court documents.²¹

Investigation, Charges, and Arrests:

On August 4, 2007, police in Goose Creek, South Carolina pulled Mohamed and Megahed over for driving 65 miles-per-hour in a 45 mile-per-hour zone. The subjects took their time pulling over, and when the officer asked Mohamed, who was driving the Toyota Camry at the time, why it had taken him so long, Mohamed replied that the "road was slanted."²²

The Naval Weapons Station Charleston is located in Goose Creek. Many of the initial media reports about the car stop made mention of the fact that this military site contains millions of pounds of conventional and nuclear ordnance and is also used as a military prison where enemy combatants such as Jose Padilla and Yasir Hamdi have been held. There is no concrete evidence that the subjects contemplated an attack on the Naval Weapons Station.

The defense claimed the subjects



¹⁶ U.S. v. Yousef Samir Megahed, (M.D. FL.), No. 8:07-cr-00342-SDM-MAP, filed October 25, 2007.

¹⁷ Valerie Kalfrin, *Family Says Son is Innocent of Explosives Charge*, Tampa Tribune, August 10, 2007.

¹⁸ *Questions Remain About U South Florida Students with Pipe Bombs*, U-Wire, August 8, 2007.

¹⁹ U.S. v. Yousef Samir Megahed, (M.D. FL.), No. 8:07-cr-00342-SDM-MAP, filed October 25, 2007.

²⁰ U.S. v. Yousef Samir Megahed, (M.D. FL.), No. 8:07-cr-00342-SDM-MAP, filed October 25, 2007.

²¹ U.S. v. Yousef Samir Megahed, (M.D. FL.), No. Case No. 8:07-CR-342-T-27-MAP, Motion for Reconsideration of Court's October 25, 2007 Order of Detention, filed January 30, 2008.

²² Transcript of August 4, 2007 Car Stop of Ahmed Sharif Mohamed and Yousef Samir Megahed.

were traveling off the main road in Goose Creek in order to find a Murphy Oil Gas Station, which the subjects had determined carried the least expensive brand of gas.²³

The police officer's suspicion had already been raised as he approached the vehicle and observed Megahed, who was in the passenger seat, disconnecting the wires from a laptop computer and stowing it in the back seat.²⁴ Mohamed told the officers that he owned the laptop.

Prosecutors contended that Megahed had been viewing a video of Qassam rockets being fired in the Middle East just prior to the car stop.²⁵ Qassam rockets are fueled by a mixture of potassium nitrate and sugar, encased in a solid pipe.²⁶

The subjects told the police officers that they were on their way to a beach in North Carolina. The GPS device (which had been purchased by the subjects at an Ocala, Florida Walmart just hours before the car stop) indicated that their final destination was Sunset Beach, North Carolina.^{27, 28} However, the subjects could not provide consistent answers to the officer's questions about why it had taken them so long to drive from Tampa to Goose Creek. Megahed told the officer that they had slept and gone to the beach, while Mohamed did not provide clear answers about who had been sleeping and who had been driving.²⁹

The subjects consented to a search of their car. The police officers discovered the following items in the trunk:

- Four PVC pipes that contained a mixture of potassium nitrate and cat litter;
- A sugar substance similar to "Karo" syrup;
- A package containing 20 feet of safety fuse cord;
- A five-gallon gasoline container that was three-quarters full of gasoline;
- A package that contained .22 caliber bullets.

²³ U.S. v. Yousef Samir Megahed, (M.D. FL.), No. Case No. 8:07-CR-342-T-27-MAP, Motion for Reconsideration of Court's October 25, 2007 Order of Detention, filed January 30, 2008.

²⁴ Application for Search and Seizure Warrant, (M.D. FL.), No. 2:07-cr-01167-RSC, filed September 25, 2007.

²⁵ Elaine Silvestrini, *Appeals in Explosives Case Focus on Intent*, Tampa Tribune, October 8, 2008.

²⁶ www.weaponssurvey.com, last accessed on November 6, 2008.

²⁷ U.S. v. Yousef Samir Megahed, (M.D. FL.), No. Case No. 8:07-CR-342-T-27MAP, Motion for Reconsideration of Court's October 25, 2007 Order of Detention, filed January 30, 2008.

²⁸ Sunset Beach, North Carolina is located approximately 30 miles north along the Atlantic coastline of Myrtle Beach International Airport.

²⁹ Transcript of August 4, 2007 Car Stop of Ahmed Sharif Mohamed and Youseff Samir Megahed.

Further investigation by law enforcement in Tampa, Florida, revealed that neither subject had a license to transport explosives or explosive material.³⁰ Both subjects were arrested at that point.

At the time of their arrest in Goose Creek, Megahed denied to police officers that he had any knowledge of explosive material in the car trunk. However, as officers conducted their search of the car, Mohamed and Megahed were placed in a patrol car and their conversation was recorded. Their discussion, which was in Arabic, indicated that Megahed may have had previous knowledge of the explosive material in the trunk of the car. During the conversation in the patrol car, Mohamed assured Megahed that he would tell the police that he was completely responsible for the materials in the trunk.³¹

FBI forensic specialists created replicas of PVC piping with different quantities of sugar, potassium nitrate, and cat litter, and determined that devices assembled by the subjects would not have been able to create an explosion.³²

Mohamed told investigators that he had previously tested his homemade sugar rockets and that they only burned and flew a few feet, but did not explode.³³

After their arrest, Mohamed waived detention hearings and remained in custody. Megahed was granted a conditional release. A District Court judge in Florida revoked Megahed's release, finding that he was a flight risk and that he presented a danger to the community.³⁴ Megahed was re-incarcerated and then released again on \$200,000 bail in May 2008, after nine months in detention. His conditions for release were: 1. He would remain under house arrest, 2. Members of his household must surrender their passports, and 3. Neither he nor any of his family members could access the Internet from their home. Megahed also had to wear a tracking device and could only leave the home for court appearances, meetings with his attorney, and pre-approved religious functions.³⁵

In February 2008, Mohamed selected a new legal team to represent him. His new lawyers also represented former USF professor Sami al-Arian,³⁶ who stood trial in 2005 and 2006 for funding terrorism.

³⁰ Application for Search and Seizure Warrant, (M.D. Florida), No. 2:07-cr-01167-RSC, filed September 25, 2007.

³¹ U.S. v. Yousef Samir Megahed, (M.D. FL.), No. 8:07-cr-00342-SDM-MAP, filed October 25, 2007.

³² U.S. v. Yousef Samir Megahed, (M.D. FL.), No. 8:07-CR-342-T-27-MAP, Motion for Reconsideration of Court's October 25, 2007 Order of Detention, filed January 30, 2008.

³³ U.S. v. Yousef Samir Megahed, (M.D. FL.), No. Case No. 8:07-CR-342-T-27-MAP, Motion for Reconsideration of Court's October 25, 2007 Order of Detention, filed January 30, 2008.

³⁴ U.S. v. Yousef Samir Megahed, (M.D. FL.), No. 8:07-cr-00342-SDM-MAP, filed October 25, 2007.

³⁵ Kevin Graham, *Megahed Freed on Bail*, St. Petersburg Times, May 6, 2008.

³⁶ *USF Student Picks New Attorney on Federal Explosives Charge*, ABC Action News (Tampa Affiliate), February 12, 2008.

Mohamed was found guilty for material support of terrorism on December 18, 2008, and was sentenced to 15 years in federal prison, the maximum sentence.

Megahed was found not guilty by a Florida jury on April 3, 2009, but was re-arrested on April 6, 2009 by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officials. ICE has charged him with possessing items that could be assembled into an explosive device.³⁷ Their case to deport Megahed back to Egypt will be based on the same evidence for which he was prosecuted in federal criminal court.³⁸

Forensic Investigation of Mohamed's Hard-Drive:

An FBI review of Mohamed's laptop hard-drive revealed a folder titled "Bomb Shock." One file was the aforementioned homemade instructional video in which Mohamed explains how a remote-control toy is constructed and operated and how it can be converted into a detonator.⁴¹ Mohamed later told FBI investigators that he created the video in order to assist those living in Arab countries to "fight invaders;" specifically American troops.⁴²

Mohamed filmed the video in his apartment in Tampa and uploaded it to YouTube, using the screen name "Michaljebral" approximately a month prior to his arrest in Goose Creek.⁴³ Mohamed used the phrases "detonator from a distance," "remote control," "igniter," "fireworks," "radio wireless," "converting toy explosives," "rockets," "controlled car," and "martyrdoms [sic] suiciders," as search words to link viewers to this video.⁴⁴ The video was viewed hundreds of times.^{45, 46}

³⁷ Chandra Broadwater, *Family Visits Megahed in Glades County*, St. Petersburg Times, April 13, 2009.

³⁸ Elaine Silvestrini, *ICE Puts Chill on Megahed Acquittal*, Tampa Tribune, April 12, 2009.

⁴¹ Application for Search and Seizure Warrant, (M.D. Florida), No. 2:07-cr-01167-RSC, filed September 25, 2007.

⁴² U.S. v Ahmed Abdellatif Sherif Mohamed, (M.D. FL.), No. 8:07-Cr-342-T-23-MAP, Plea Agreement, filed June 13, 2008.

⁴³ U.S. v Ahmed Abdellatif Sherif Mohamed, (M.D. FL.), No. 8:07-Cr-342-T-23-MAP, Plea Agreement, filed June 13, 2008.

⁴⁴ Application for Search and Seizure Warrant, (M.D. FL.), No. 2:07-cr-01167-RSC, filed September 25, 2007.

⁴⁵ U.S. v Ahmed Abdellatif Sherif Mohamed, (M.D. FL.), No. 8:07-Cr-342-T-23-MAP, Plea Agreement, filed June 13, 2008.

⁴⁶ After creating the video, Mohamed reassembled the toy and returned it to Walmart for a cash refund, as per U.S. v Ahmed Abdellatif Sherif Mohamed, (M.D. FL.), No. 8:07-Cr-342-T-23-MAP, Plea Agreement, filed June 13, 2008.

The laptop also contained downloads of detailed instructions on how to fabricate explosive devices constructed from TNT and C4.⁴⁷ The investigation of the laptop also revealed visits to web sites about Hamas fighters and martyrdom, as well as instructional sites on how to use an M-16 rifle.⁴⁸

Investigators determined that there was a direct correlation between Mohamed's online research on explosive material and his shopping patterns. For example, on June 23, 2007, Mohamed visited web sites that described the construction of fireworks. On June 25, 2007, Mohamed purchased a bag of garden sulfur, a bag of stump remover (potassium nitrate), and charcoal, which are materials used to make fireworks. Mohamed purchased four more bags of stump remover between June 25 and August 2, 2007.⁴⁹

On June 30, and again on July 2, 2007, Mohamed visited web sites that described the construction of rockets and rocket propellants. Between July 1 and July 9, Mohamed purchased PVC pipes, pipe caps, PVC adaptors, and a PVC plug. He also purchased two model rocket starter kits and the remote control toy he used in the demonstrational video he posted to YouTube.⁵⁰

On July 30, 2007, Mohamed visited a web site that provided directions for making triacetone peroxide (TATP), the same substance used by the London transit bombers, on July 7, 2005. The same web site described how TATP could be used as a booster in an ammonium nitrate bomb. The day after visiting this web site, on July 31, 2007, Mohamed went to a store and purchased hydrogen peroxide and nail polish remover, two ingredients used to make TATP.⁵¹

Search of Megahed's Tampa Home:

Law enforcement officers seized the Megahed's family computer in a search of their home, on August 6, 2007. Forensic investigation found that the computer had been used to download videos of attacks using improvised explosive devices against US troops in the Middle East.⁵² The judge in the federal case ruled that this evidence could not be used at trial because it was submitted to the defense after the deadline for sharing evidence.⁵³

The same computer had been used to query the legal status of AK-47s. However, at his trial, an FBI computer forensics expert explained that Megahed

⁴⁷ Application for Search and Seizure Warrant, (M.D. FL.), No. 2:07-cr-01167-RSC, filed September 25, 2007.

⁴⁸ U.S. v. Yousef Samir Megahed, (M.D. FL.), No. 8:07-cr-00342-SDM-MAP, filed October 25, 2007.

⁴⁹ U.S. v Ahmed Sharif Mohamed, (M.D. FL.), No. 8:07-CR-342-T-23-MAP, Sentencing Memorandum, filed November 4, 2008.

⁵⁰ U.S. v Ahmed Sharif Mohamed, (M.D. FL.), No. 8:07-CR-342-T-23-MAP, Sentencing Memorandum, filed November 4, 2008.

⁵¹ U.S. v Ahmed Sharif Mohamed, (M.D. FL.), No. 8:07-CR-342-T-23MAP, Sentencing Memorandum, filed November 4, 2008.

⁵² Elaine Silvestrini, *Mohamed's Plea Leaves Questions*, Tampa Tribune, June 19, 2008.

⁵³ Elaine Silvestrini, *Mohamed's Plea Leaves Questions*, Tampa Tribune, June 19, 2008.

spent less than a minute examining each web page describing gun laws and other related material.⁵⁴

Search of 12402 Pampas Place, Tampa, Florida:

On August 7, 2007, the FBI searched a home in Tampa, Florida owned by Noor Salhab, in connection with Mohamed and Megahed's case. Salhab's son lived in the house, and the other bedrooms were rented out by USF students. Mohamed was supposed to move into the house after August 7, 2007, and had already stored personal items in the house prior to his road trip with Megahed.⁵⁵

Salhab's son, Ghasan, told reporters that he had seen Megahed at the house, but had not seen Mohamed there.⁵⁶

Records show that Salhab had rented the Pampas Place house to the World and Islamic Studies Enterprise (WISE), in the early 1990s. WISE was a think tank operated by Sami al-Arian.⁵⁷

Al-Arian was a computer science professor at the University of South Florida, who in 2003, was charged with funding terrorist organizations. After a mistrial in 2005, al-Arian pled guilty to one count of conspiracy to provide services to the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, in spring 2006.⁵⁸

There are no reports of personal interaction between al-Arian and the subjects. Mohamed came to USF when al-Arian was already in federal detention.

Salhab and his wife rented a home that was owned by Sameeh Hammoudeh, a co-defendant in the trial of al-Arian.⁵⁹

In July 2007, Ahmed Ishtay, a resident of the Pampas Place house, and Mohamed were given citations for shooting at squirrels with a pellet gun in a local park.⁶⁰

Training:

There are no open-source reports that indicate either subject received formal terrorist training.

⁵⁴ Justin George, *Megahed Jurors Hear About Web Browsing*, St. Petersburg Times, March 21, 2009.

⁵⁵ Jason Geary, *Landlord Reveals Items FBI Seized*, Tampa Tribune, August 13, 2007.

⁵⁶ Catherine Shoichet, *House Search Part of Inquiry*, St. Petersburg Times, August 13, 2007.

⁵⁷ Jason Geary, *Landlord Reveals Items FBI Seized*, Tampa Tribune, August 13, 2007.

⁵⁸ William March, *Case Could Bring Back Angst of Al Arian Era*, Tampa Tribune, September 1, 2007.

⁵⁹ Ben Montgomery, *After Visit Family Waits*, St. Petersburg Times, August 12, 2007.

⁶⁰ Catherine Shoichet, *House Search Part of Inquiry*, St. Petersburg Times, August 13, 2007.

Mohamed and fellow USF graduate students, Karim Moussaoui and Ahmed Ishtay, accompanied Megahed to a local Tampa firing range on July 11, 2007.⁶¹ Megahed registered for membership at the range and rented a 9 mm Glock handgun. The firing range personnel observed both Megahed and Moussaoui firing the weapon. Moussaoui, who entered the U.S. from Morocco on a student visa, was convicted in April 2008 for handling and discharging a firearm, which is illegal for a nonimmigrant alien. He was sentenced to six months in prison.⁶²

On July 19, Megahed went to the same shooting range and practiced shooting with a WaltherG22 rifle and a Smith & Wesson .22 caliber hand gun.⁶⁴ Megahed kept a .22 caliber rifle in a storage unit. Law enforcement also discovered welding equipment in the same storage unit.⁶⁵

On July 17, and on July 18, 2007, Mohamed went to a local Walmart store and inquired about purchasing a .22 caliber rifle. He was unable to purchase the rifle because he did not have proper proof of permanent residency status in the United States, which is required by law in order to purchase or possess firearms.⁶⁶

Ideological Motivators:

None of the media reports or court documentation describe the brand of Islam the subjects subscribe to. There is no mention of their religious practices or whether either regularly attended a mosque.

Investigations showed that Mohamed had visited terrorist web sites, including Hamas', in order to view demonstrations of the use of improvised explosive devices. Investigation of the Megahed family computer showed visits to Hamas web sites and other sites that demonstrated the use of improvised explosive devices.

There is no reporting that the subjects visited web sites that emphasized extreme religious ideology.

There is no evidence to show that Mohamed and Megahed were affiliated with any terrorist group. However, Mohamed's anti-American statements and his instructional video, as well as his interest in terrorist attacks and weaponry,

⁶¹ U.S. v. Karim Moussaoui, (M.D. FL.), No. 8:07-MJ-1520-TEAJ, filed November 14, 2007.

⁶² Sherri Ackerman and Valerie Kalfrin, *USF Grad Gets Six-Month Term*, Tampa Tribune, July 15, 2008.

⁶⁴ U.S. v. Karim Moussaoui, (M.D. FL.), No. 8:07-MJ-1520-TEAJ, filed November 14, 2007.

⁶⁵ U.S. v. Yousef Samir Megahed, (M.D. FL.), No. 8:07-cr-00342-SDM-MAP, filed October 25, 2007.

⁶⁶ U.S. v. Ahmed Sharif Mohamed, (M.D. FL.), No. 8:07-CR-342-T-23-MAP, Sentencing Memorandum, filed November 4, 2008.

⁷¹ Transcript of August 4, 2007 Car Stop of Ahmed Sharif Mohamed and Yousef Samir Megahed.

evidenced by his Internet searches, shows an appreciation for violent actions undertaken by designated foreign terrorist groups against U.S. persons.

In the transcript of the Goose Creek car stop, one police officer comments that both the subjects had Korans on their laps at the time they were pulled over.⁷¹ However, there was no further reporting about a Koran in the car. Whether that fact was overlooked in subsequent reports, or if Arabic-language books seen in the car were possibly mistaken for Korans, is not confirmed.

FBI agents found a poem on Mohamed's laptop that appeared to have been written by him. The poem expressed his personal disaffection with the current Egyptian government and was supportive of current and former jihadist leaders, including Osama bin Laden, Sayyid Outb, Hussan al-Banna, Abdullah Azzam, Fawzy al-Sa'id, Mohammed bin Abb-al-Magsud, and Ibn Taymyyah.⁷² Court documents do not mention if there was any literature written by the aforementioned Islamist ideologues on Mohamed's computer.

Mohamed felt that American and allied troops were infidel invaders of Muslim countries and that Muslims should be able to defend their countries against them.⁷³

After receiving a citation for shooting at squirrels in a public park in Tampa, Mohamed created a videotape of himself describing the event. In the tape, he referred to police officers as "dogs", "Christians", "infidels", and "racists". He joked about feigning diabetic hypoglycemia in order to receive more lenient treatment from the officers. In the same video, Mohamed characterized Americans as being "one of the most stupid creations of God."⁷⁴

While in custody awaiting trial in April 2008, Mohamed wrote a letter to a Hillsboro County Jail deputy sarcastically "congratulating" him on a recent Pentagon announcement that 4,000 U.S. troops had died in the Middle East.⁷⁵

In a November 26, 2007 letter from jail, Mohamed wrote that Muslims have only two choices: "Either Jihad and uprising, fighting, and self-victory, money, family, and fighting for God" or sitting at home "praying and fasting." "In order to achieve victory," he continued, "Muslims need to deceive the infidels, and keep them in the dark."⁷⁶

⁷² U.S. v Ahmed Sharif Mohamed, (M.D. FL.), No. 8:07-CR-342-T-23-MAP, Sentencing Memorandum, filed November 4, 2008.

⁷³ Application for Search and Seizure Warrant, (M.D. FL.), No. 2:07-cr-01167-RSC, filed September 25, 2007.

⁷⁴ U.S. v Ahmed Sharif Mohamed, (M.D. FL.), No. 8:07-CR-342-T-23MAP, Sentencing Memorandum, filed November 4, 2008.

⁷⁵ Kevin Graham, *Prosecutors Cite Evidence of Hatred*, St. Petersburg Times, November 5, 2008.

⁷⁶ U.S. v Ahmed Sharif Mohamed, (M.D. FL.), No. 8:07-CR-342-T-23-MAP, Sentencing Memorandum, filed November 4, 2008.

Conclusions:

- The car stop in Goose Creek is an example of outstanding vigilance in police work. Officers followed through on their suspicions to prevent the escalation of the subjects’ activities, which may have eventually resulted in a terrorist attack.
- Law enforcement personnel should remain vigilant of deception tactics. As mentioned earlier in this report, Mohamed considered faking an episode of diabetic hypoglycemia in order to divert police officers’ attention as they wrote him a citation for shooting a pellet gun in a public park.
- Based on Mohamed’s activities, which began shortly after he arrived in the U.S. from Egypt, it is likely that he was radicalized before he entered the U.S. Based solely upon court documents, it is not possible to definitively determine whether Megahed also shared Mohamed’s radical world view or whether Mohamed was in the process of trying to radicalize Megahed. Additionally, court records do not indicate when Megahed’s interest in improvised explosive devices developed, or whether he had an interest before he began interacting with Mohamed. However, it is evident that Mohamed was able to develop a community of friends who shared an interest in firearms. Although there is no publically available information indicating that Mohamed intended to orchestrate a terrorist attack in the U.S., the behavioral patterns of Mohamed, Megahed, and their friends are consistent with the development of other operational terrorist cells, such as the group in Toronto that intended to attack the Canadian parliament in 2004, and the perpetrators of the London transit attacks.
- There was clear escalation in the explosive potency of materials Mohamed purchased, as well as escalation in the intention to create devices that looked less like fireworks and more like serious improvised explosive devices that could be used in an attack.

Chronology of Events:

Mohamed arrested and imprisoned in Egypt. Mohamed claimed to FBI in S.C. that he had been a political detainee. His lawyer claims he merely donated to a charity.	2003
Mohamed arrives in United States from Egypt to pursue Ph.D. in engineering from University of South Florida.	January 2007
Mohamed visits web sites that describe construction of fireworks.	June 23, 2007

Mohamed purchases ingredients required to make fireworks, including 5 bags of stump remover.	June 25, 2007 – August 2, 2007
Mohamed visits web sites that describe construction of rockets.	July 2, 2007
Mohamed purchases PVC pipes, model rocket kits, and remote control toy.	July 2 – July 9, approximately
Mohamed purchases ingredients to create “sugar rockets”.	June/July 2007
Megahed purchases a .22 caliber rifle with scope.	July 2007
Megahed applies for membership at firing range. He is accompanied by Mohamed, Ishtay and Moussaoui. They rent a 9mm, which witnesses say Megahed and Moussaoui took turns shooting.	July 11, 2007
Megahed rents a WaltherG22 rifle and a Smith & Wesson .22 caliber hand gun at the firing range.	July 19, 2007
Mohamed goes to Walmart to purchase a .22 rifle, but is unable to because he is not a permanent resident.	July 19, 2007
Mohamed returns to Walmart and makes second attempt to purchase rifle, but is denied because he does not have proper documentation.	July 20, 2007
Tampa police issue citations to Mohamed and a friend for illegally shooting at squirrels with a pellet gun in a local park.	July 24, 2007
Mohamed visits web sites that describe construction of TATP and ammonium nitrate-based explosive devices.	July 30, 2007
Mohamed purchases hydrogen peroxide and nail polish remover.	July 31, 2007
Remote-control-car-as-detonating-device instructional video uploaded to YouTube from Mohamed’s laptop.	July 31, 2007
Subjects begin drive from Florida to North Carolina.	August 4, 2007, early morning
Subjects stop at Ocala, Florida Walmart and inquire about cost of rifles. They purchase GPS, electrical inverter, and electric drill.	August 4, 2007, 0400 hrs
Subjects stop at Jacksonville Walmart and purchase cleaning kit for .30-caliber weapon.	August 4, 2007, 0700 hrs
Subjects veer off main route between Tampa and Sunset Beach, North Carolina.	August 4, 2007, between 0700 and 1730 hrs
Berkeley County (Goose Creek, SC)	August 4, 2007, approximately 1730

Sheriffs pull Megahed and Mohamed over for speeding.	hrs
Remote-control boat, photo of Moussaoui posing with .22, dismantled digital watch, and other items recovered from a search of Megahed's Florida home.	August 6, 2007
Salhab property searched by FBI in connection with case.	August 12, 2007
Florida grand jury indictment charges both subjects with transporting explosives illegally from Florida to South Carolina and charges Mohamed with creating and distributing instructional video to help terrorists.	August 29, 2007
USF notifies Mohamed and Megahed of their provisional suspension from school.	September 2, 2007
State criminal charges against subjects dismissed by South Carolina because of federal indictment.	September 6, 2007
Megahed files motion to sever his case from Mohamed's.	November 7, 2007
Mohamed selects new defense lawyers. New team also represented Sami al-Arian.	February 12, 2008
Federal judge rules that Mohamed will have a second trial on separate charge that he demonstrated construction of detonation device on YouTube video; upholds previous ruling that the two will stand trial together on other charges.	March 6, 2008
Mohamed sends letter to Hillsboro County Jail deputy "congratulating" him on announcement that 4,000 troops had died in Middle East.	April 1, 2008
Trial scheduled to begin, but delay announced because of dispute over evidence.	May 5, 2008
Megahed released from prison on \$200,000 bail; remains under house arrest.	May 6, 2008
Mohamed pleads guilty to material support of terrorism.	June 18, 2008
Mohamed sentenced to 15 years; the maximum penalty for material support of terrorism.	December 18, 2008
Megahed acquitted of charges of illegally transporting explosives by federal criminal jury.	April 3, 2009
Megahed re-arrested by ICE officials outside of a Walmart where he had been shopping for groceries with his	April 6, 2009

family. Placed in detention, where he is awaiting a hearing.	
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