

The duty of all

Gun clerk's quick thinking is reminder that each of us must be wary for terrorism

There are no civilians in the war on terror.

Latest evidence: The tip that ultimately led to last week's arrest of 21-year-old Army Pfc. Naser Jason Abdo, who reportedly admitted to a plan to detonate two bombs in a restaurant popular with Fort Hood military personnel, came from Greg Ebert, a clerk at a Killeen weapons retailer.

Ebert sensed something amiss with Abdo during a transaction. He then took action by contacting the authorities.

Employees of companies who deal in explosive chemicals or compounds are on the very front lines when combating homegrown acts of terrorism, such as the one Abdo, a native Texan, allegedly planned.

We don't have any way of knowing who will commit the next act of terror, where it will come from or what brand of extremism will be championed. Anders Breivik's neo-Nazi rampage on a Labor Party youth camp in peaceful Norway illustrates that.

Terrorism has devastated countless lives worldwide. Those of us who do see any red flags should be prepared to act upon them, whether we're in the military, work as retail clerks or simply live down the street.

Warding off terrorism is not a battle that law enforcement can fight alone. The eyes and ears of all citizens are required to pick up on hints that something is afoot before it's too late.

Last summer, the Department of Homeland Security launched a broad public awareness campaign, "If you see something, say something." It presses the public to report "behavior reasonably indicative of criminal activity related to terrorism."

Police departments in New York, Los Angeles and Dallas have launched similar localized programs, and police departments in Central Texas would do well to follow suit. With Fort Hood, the largest military installation in the United States, and former President George W. Bush's ranch nearby, security should be routine for those of us here. Many of us got into the practice during Bush's eight years in office.

Considering the 2009 attack on Fort Hood by Army psychiatrist Nidal Hasan and an alleged spring 2011 plot targeting Bush's Dallas home, terrorism prevention should be a priority in Central Texas. Such programs can supplement existing crime-tip hot lines and provide communities with practical tools to defend themselves against terrorism.

Ultimately, we should embrace common sense and responsible reporting rather than responding with paranoia or indifference. Given the right knowledge, attitude and resolve, Central Texans like Greg Ebert can save lives through their vigilance.

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