

Case 34: Times Square

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The failed attempt by Faisal Shahzad to set off a car bomb in Times Square in May 2010 is particularly notable in that it was a self-motivated, “lone wolf” operation, entirely planned and put together by one man. Partly in result, his preparations were not picked up by police. But it hardly mattered in the end.

The perpetrator, a native of Pakistan with a privileged upbringing, had lived in the United States for several years and had received citizenship in 2009. A couple of months after doing so, motivated by hostility toward America’s wars in the Middle East and by the plight of the Palestinians, he abandoned his American-born wife and children in the United States to travel to Pakistan. His anger was escalated by an American drone strike on the border area between Pakistan and Afghanistan in October, and he walked out on his parents who disapproved of his perspective and took off for a terrorist camp run by the Pakistan Taliban where he underwent 40 days of training between December 1, 2009, and January 25, 2010.

Shahzad’s training camp experience does not seem to have served him well. The bomb on which he threw away his freedom was reported from the start to be “really amateurish,” with some analysts charitably speculating when it was first examined that it might be “some sort of test run” created by “someone who’s learning how to make a bomb and will learn from what went wrong with this.”¹ Apparently because it is difficult to buy explosive fertilizer, Shahzad purchased the non-exploding kind instead.² It is not clear why he didn’t use dirt or dried figs for his explosive material since these are cheaper, easier to find, and will fail to explode with same alacrity as non-explosive fertilizer. He also threw in some gasoline—which doesn’t explode either, though it does burn—as well as some propane that will only explode when mixed precisely with the right amount of air, a bomb-design nicety Shahzad apparently never learned in his weeks of training. The crudely-wired contraption was to be triggered by a cheap-looking alarm clock laced to a can of fireworks which did sputter and smoke for a while, attracting the attention of people nearby who then alerted the police.³

The authorities quickly traced the vehicle mostly—perhaps entirely—by applying standard police work, taking advantage of Shahzad’s many blunders of planning and execution (they didn’t even have to rely on the many security cameras that cover the very public target area he chose). In result, as David Tan documents, the culprit was apprehended within two days and will now spend the rest of his life dealing with his rage in a jail cell.

¹ “Car Bomb In Times Square Fails to Explode,” Weekend Edition, NPR, May 2, 2010.

² Anahad O’Connor, “Weak Times Sq. Car Bomb Is Called Intentional,” *New York Times*, July 21, 2010. Peter Grier, “Why the Times Square bomb failed spectacularly,” *csmonitor.com*, May 3, 2010.

³ Grier, “Why the Times Square bomb failed spectacularly.”

Hype-meisters were not caught unprepared. As Tan reports, the chief of staff of the White House's National Security Council insisted that Shahzad was trying "to kill thousands of Americans," a casualty rate wildly higher than any ever achieved by any car bomb, and, in fact, far higher than has been caused by any terrorist action in history outside of 9/11. (Shahzad has said he was actually trying to kill 40, as Tan notes.) Similarly numerically-challenged, Obama adviser Bruce Riedel declared that "we almost had" in the Times Square effort "a 9/11-type mass casualty attack."⁴ Shadad's effort was sometimes compared to Timothy McVeigh's Oklahoma truck bombing of 1995 that killed 165. It is useful to note, however, that McVeigh's bomb contained 4,000 pounds of the right kind of fertilizer while Shadad had only 200-250 pounds (of the wrong kind) in his.⁵

The American authorities were fully matched by the Pakistan Taliban which was delighted to take full responsibility for the abject failure. As they say, any publicity is good publicity—particularly when the people they want to intimidate help the effort by characterizing fiascos as near-9/11s. The process is one in which, as Bart Kosko puts it, the "government plays safe by overestimating the terrorist threat, while the terrorists oblige by overestimating their power."⁶

⁴ Bruce Riedel, speaking on his book, *Deadly Embrace*, on February 22, 2011 as telecast by C-SPAN2 on March 12, 2011.

⁵ Grier, "Why the Times Square bomb failed spectacularly."

⁶ Bart Kosko, "Terror Threat May Be Mostly a Big Bluff," *Los Angeles Times*, September 13, 2004.

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1. Overview

On May 1, 2010 at 6:38 pm, Faisal Shahzad parked a Nissan Pathfinder at 1 Astor Plaza, 1515 Broadway, at Times Square in New York City with the intent of setting off a bomb to inflict civilian casualties. He then deserted the scene leaving the engine running with hazard lights flashing.¹ A mounted New York City police officer was alerted by a T-shirt vendor on the sidewalk who saw smoke coming out of the back of the SUV. The officer then called for backup and moved the crowds away for safety.² The bomb failed to explode, though it was reported to be smoking and emitting popping sounds. A robot drone was used to open the doors. The SUV contained “three canisters of propane like those used for barbecue grills, two five-gallon cans of gasoline, consumer-grade fireworks, and two clocks with batteries.”³

At 7 pm, Shahzad called his landlord to let him in because, he said, he had lost his keys. In reality, he had left the keys hanging from the ignition in the locked Nissan Pathfinder. These were analyzed and traced back to him.⁴ Two days later, he was arrested at John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York, aboard a plane that was about to take off for the Middle East.⁵

Every vehicle has a Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) and in this case, the VIN provided the linchpin for the investigation. The SUV’s most obvious VIN was found to be almost unidentifiable due to filing, and the vehicle’s license plates had been changed.⁶ However, the police eventually retrieved the VIN from the bottom of its engine block, and this led investigators to the registered owner of the vehicle and then to Shahzad who had purchased it on April 24 for \$1,300 through Craigslist.⁷ Investigators uncovered Shahzad’s name from a telephone number he submitted while returning to the United States from Pakistan. The number had been entered into a “Customs and Border Protection agency database” as a call “made to or from the prepaid cellular phone” and was

¹ Nick Allen and Gordon Rayner, “Times Square Car Bomb: Police Investigate South Park Link,” *The Telegraph*, May 2, 2010.

² Alison Gendar, Rocco Parascandola, Kevin Deutsch, and Samuel Goldsmith, “Time Square Car Bomb: Cops Evacuate Heart of NYC after ‘potential Terrorist Attack’,” *New York Daily News*, May 1, 2010.

³ Al Baker and William K. Rashbaum, “Police Find Car Bomb in Times Square,” *New York Times*, May 1, 2010.

⁴ James Barron and Michael S. Schmidt, “From Suburban Father to a Terrorism Suspect,” *New York Times*, May 4, 2010.

⁵ Geraldine Baum, “Failed Times Square Bomber Faisal Shahzad Gets Life in Prison,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 5, 2010.

⁶ Tom Hays and Deepti Hajela, “Times Square Bomb Investigation [UPDATE: ‘It Appears To Be A Car Bomb,’ Police Say],” *Huffington Post*, May 2, 2010.

⁷ CNN Wire Staff, “Times Square Suspect Had Explosives Training, Documents Say,” CNN, May 5, 2010.

discovered on May 3.⁸ Consequently, he was placed on a federal no-fly list and the restriction helped Customs and Border Protection agents detain him before his Emirates Flight took off for Dubai which he presumably planned to use as a gateway to disappear.⁹

On May 4 Shahzad was charged by the federal government in the U.S. District Court for “attempting to use a weapon of mass destruction, acts of terrorism transcending national boundaries, use of a destructive device in connection with criminal violence, transporting and receiving explosives, and damaging and destroying property by means of fire.”¹⁰ He pled guilty on ten counts and was unrepentant during his court appearance. He was not offered a plea deal and received the maximum sentence, life in prison.¹¹

2. Nature of the adversary

Faisal Shahzad was not economically destitute, on drugs, nor did he have criminal record. He was self-recruited, religiously fanatical, unhappy, humiliated, ideological, frustrated by America’s foreign policy, suicidal, and determined.

He was born in Pakistan. His father was a senior military officer, and he lived in privilege, tended to by chauffeurs, servants, and armed guards, leading the *New York Times* to describe him as having led a sheltered existence. The beginnings of his anti-American sentiment occurred after the Pakistan economy stalled under hefty sanctions from the United States on Pakistan due to the nuclear program of military dictator General Mohammad Zia. Shahzad’s school had an anti-Western slant and a strict form of Islamic studies which were imposed nationally by General Zia. He later enrolled in Greenwich University, a business school in Karachi but did not excel in his studies. Taking advantage of a partnership between his college and the University of Bridgeport in Connecticut, he transferred there on January 16, 1999.¹²

Shahzad was described as a confident young man who showed off his gym-honed muscles in tight T-shirts, and was gregarious, popular, and known to be a playboy.¹³ His Certificate of Eligibility for Non-immigrant Student Status showed that he was awarded grant money to attend the school beginning in January 1999.¹⁴ He graduated in 2001 with a bachelor’s degree in computer applications and information systems. Working first as a clerk for Elizabeth Arden in Stamford and obtaining an H1B visa for three years, he went on to take a job as a junior financial analyst at Affinion Group in Norwalk.¹⁵ Thus, Shahzad enjoyed the financial promise of the United States and was given scholarships and grants to succeed.

⁸ Masuiki Hiroko, “Times Square Bomb Attempt (May 1, 2010),” *nytimes.com*, May 24, 2010.

⁹ CNN, “Times”.

¹⁰ CNN, “Times.”

¹¹ Baum, “Failed Times Square Bomber.”

¹² Andrea Elliott, Sabrina Tavernise, and Anne Barnard, “For Times Sq. Suspect, Long Roots of Discontent,” *New York Times*, May 15, 2010.

¹³ Elliott et al., “For Times Sq. Suspect.”

¹⁴ Kate Ramunni, “Exclusive: Documents Found near Bomb Suspect’s Former Shelton Home - Connecticut Post,” *CTPost.com - Connecticut Post*. May 4, 2010.

¹⁵ Barron and Schmidt, “From.”

In 2006, his new religiosity grew, as did his discontent. He no longer drank and was praying five times a day. On a visit to Pakistan in 2008, he asked his parents for permission to fight in Afghanistan, but his father denied his request.¹⁶

The following year, 2009, Shahzad was ready to leave the United States as he was tired of the commute and keeping up payments for his mortgage. He resolved to become an American citizen to help him find lucrative work with an American company in the Middle East with fellow Muslims.¹⁷ He got his citizenship on April 17, 2009.

He had in the meantime married and his American-born wife increasingly bore the brunt of his increased radicalism, forced now to wear a hijab and to follow the more conservative ideals of Islam. Having been born in America, she was not used to the new nature of the household. Despite being seen as “dot[ing] on his children and serving them,” he left his wife and children on June 2, 2009, to stay with his parents in Peshawar, Pakistan, while the bank foreclosed on his Connecticut home. In one phone call from the airport he gave his wife an ultimatum to move the family with him to Pakistan. She turned him down.¹⁸

He bluffed his parents about any terrorist plans. They did not want him to be a part of the terrorist networks. Soon he left to train at a terrorist camp in the volatile Waziristan region where he learned—or at least studied—how to make bombs.

3. Motivation

Shahzad’s motivations for the attempted bombing were a combination of United States foreign policy, grievances, justice, revenge, and rage. This is illustrated in his email, sent at midnight on February 25, 2006 to a group of friends, stating that “the trials of his fellow Muslims weighed on him—the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the plight of Palestinians, the publication in Denmark of cartoons lampooning the prophet Muhammad.”¹⁹ Thus, the anger did not just stem from American actions in the Middle East, but also from the actions of the western world and Israel.

He also stated that “everyone knows how the Muslim country bows down to pressure from west [and] everyone knows the kind of humiliation we are faced with around the globe.” He was humiliated, grieved, and wanted revenge. His friends and colleagues noted that he was always “very upset about the fabrication of Weapons of Mass Destruction to attack Iraq and killing noncombatants.” He felt American Muslims were treated differently after 9/11. After the 9/11 attacks he would angrily say, “They had it coming.”²⁰

He declared himself a “holy warrior” (mujahid) and a Muslim soldier called to wage war in the United States as “part of the answer to the U.S. terrorizing Muslims nations and the Muslim people” at the U.S. District Court in

¹⁶ Elliott et al., “For Times Sq. Suspect.”

¹⁷ Elliott et al., “For Times Sq. Suspect.”

¹⁸ Elliott et al., “For Times Sq. Suspect.”

¹⁹ Elliott et al., “For Times Sq. Suspect.”

²⁰ Elliott et al., “For Times Sq. Suspect.”

New York in June 2010.²¹ Shahzad explains that, because Americans do not see drones killing the children in Afghanistan and do not care or advocate for those that are not Americans elsewhere, further attacks on children and innocents are justified.²²

Under all the anger of the United States' foreign policy is also a religious motivation for the attack: "if I am given 1,000 lives, I will sacrifice them all for the sake of Allah fighting this cause, defending our lands, making the world of Allah supreme over any religion or system."²³ This motivation covers the defense of the Islamic world, and also covers the seemingly never ending endeavor to spread Islam to the rest of the world.

The one specific event that sparked his anger even further occurred in October of 2009 when he was "angered by the America-led drone strikes along the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan." This led to his bluffing of his parents and leaving home for the training camps in December.²⁴

Although it is unrealistic to determine all the motivations that came into play in terms of this terrorist act, the fact is that these motivations overshadowed his love for his wife, his children, and his career. However, his motivation was more about the United States' actions than about the existence of the United States itself.

4. Goals

The case of the Times Square car bomber illustrates the current state of terrorism in the United States. Although the would-be terrorists are ill-equipped and ill-trained for the most part, al-Qaeda and its allies have adopted a strategy by which they endeavor to overwhelm and distract their adversaries to the point of exhaustion. Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), also known as Pakistan Taliban, claimed responsibility for the attack. Shahzad declared himself a holy warrior, or mujahid, who had been deployed by Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan to wage war on the United States and described himself as "part of the answer to the U.S. terrorizing Muslim nations and the Muslim people."²⁵

TTP's long-term goal was essentially to create terror at low cost for the purposes of damaging public opinion of the United States' political leadership in terms of their stance on the Middle East.²⁶ This is seen in Shahzad's statement that "Muslims would never accept Western forces in their countries fighting on a 'pretext for your democracy and freedom'" and that the last nine years of war have "achieved nothing except to awaken Muslims to defend their 'religion, people, honor and land'."²⁷ He wants to create a disillusionment of the United States through terror and fear, leading Americans to lobby to change their country's foreign policy.

²¹ Peter Bergen and Bruce Hoffman, "Report on Assessing Threat of Radicalization and Domestic Terrorism," Washington, DC: Bipartisan Policy Center, September 10, 2010, 25.

²² Ibid.

²³ Baum, "Failed Times Square Bomber."

²⁴ Elliott et al., "For Times Sq. Suspect."

²⁵ Bergen and Hoffman, "Report," 24.

²⁶ Bergen and Hoffman, "Report," 25.

²⁷ Baum, "Failed Times Square Bomber."

5. Plans for violence

Faisal Shahzad had concrete plans for violence. He bought a Nissan Pathfinder SUV online and acquired all the raw materials for the bomb. His plan was to drive into Times Square, park his car, set the clock timer, and walk away to see the explosion.

The fact that it was a failure suggests that he did not necessarily know what he was doing. As noted, Shahzad told the judge at his trial that he underwent “bomb-making training during a 40-day stay with Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan in Pakistan between December 9, 2009 and January 25, 2010.”²⁸ Forty days of training seem quite intensive if it was for the purposes of building bombs. Although the bomb did not go off in Times Square, there were pops heard from the firecrackers, and smoke was observed from the gunpowder.

The SUV contained “three canisters of propane like those used for barbecue grills, two five gallon cans of gasoline, consumer-grade fireworks—the source of the pops—and two clocks with batteries.”²⁹ The M-88 fireworks used in the attempted car bombing were bought at a Phantom Fireworks store in Matamoras, Pennsylvania, and the shopkeeper speculated that Shahzad had intended for the fireworks to chain detonate, yet they did not do so.³⁰ There is no confirmed report that the bomb was very close to success, but the pops and smoke from the gunpowder suggest that something was going on.

There are similarities between the New York bomb and the two car bombs planted outside the Tiger nightclub in London in 2007. In both cases, the bombs contained cylinders of propane gas and cans full of petrol to be ignited by electronic detonators.³¹ In both cases, the plan was to leave a vehicle parked at a location with the intention for it to explode. In neither case did the bombs actually go off, and in both cases, authorities found the bomb by noticing smoke coming from the vehicle.³² Yet, the London bomb needed to be de-fused, whereas the bomb made by Shahzad was a dud, and was not going to explode.

Shahzad informed law enforcement officials that “he had hoped to kill at least 40 people on the first try, and that if he had not been caught he would have kept trying to set off explosives in crowded areas in New York City until he was arrested or killed.”³³ There was, then, a definite prospect, effectively, of suicide.

6. Role of informants

There were no informants for the Times Square car bombing case.

7. Connections

Shahzad acted alone when he planned and executed the attack. To a very large extent he was self-motivated. He chose to join the terrorist camp out of his

²⁸ “Pakistan Acknowledges Faisal Shahzad Met Taliban Chief,” dawn.com, July 26, 2010.

²⁹ Baker and Rashbaum, “Police.”

³⁰ CNN Wire Staff, “Times.”

³¹ Allen and Rayner, “Times.”

³² Gardham Duncan and Sally Peck. “Second Car Bomb Found in London’s West End,” *Telegraph*, June 29, 2007.

³³ Baum, “Failed Times Square Bomber.”

own volition, and was angry of his own accord. He found Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, and they sponsored his plan. They met at a time when they both could benefit from each other, and TTP provided the training while Shahzad provided himself to accomplish the task. In this sense, it was a terrorist network operating at a low cost to fund, train, and equip. When he left Pakistan in late January, he acted in a lone-wolf capacity, yet it was for the purposes of fulfilling the duty that TTP had sent him to do, and thus it can be said that there was a terrorist network operating. The group is based in Pakistan's tribal areas near the Afghan border and is known for a few of the deadliest suicide attacks in the country. And, as noted, they claimed responsibility for the May 1 Times Square car bomb plot.³⁴

Shahzad also had family links in Pakistan, where he grew up, of course, and he identified proudly with his Pashtun heritage.³⁵ Sky News broadcast a video showing "Shahzad and Hakimullah Mehsud, commander of Pakistan's umbrella Taliban faction, shaking hands, smiling and hugging sometime before the failed May 1 attack" cementing any public perception of his associations.³⁶ Pakistani Interior minister Rehman Malik told reporters that Shahzad "visited Pakistan seven times and he met Hakimullah Mehsud and also met other people, those so-called leaders of the Taliban."³⁷

8. Relation to the Muslim community

This case does not relate to the Muslim community as a whole. He was found to have connections with Muslim cleric Anwar al-Awlaki who is the central figure in many recent domestic terror attempts, as well as with Emir Beitullah Mehsud, who was a casualty of the drone missile strike in 2009.³⁸ He was childhood friends with one of the "alleged masterminds of the Mumbai massacre of 2008" in which over 170 people were killed.³⁹

9. Depiction by the authorities

The depiction of the story by the authorities when it first came out was competent. The depiction is conservative in the sense that Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano immediately stated that the government views it as a "potential terrorist attack," and these sentiments were echoed by Governor Paterson of New York as well.⁴⁰

In terms of covering the bomb itself, New York law enforcement officials went from calm to extremely alarmist. The first night, Kevin B. Barry, a former supervisor in the New York Police Department bomb squad, stated that, had the device worked, "it would be more of an incendiary event than an explosion."⁴¹ However, the next day Commissioner Ray Kelly said that "the bomb looks like it

³⁴ "Pakistan Acknowledges Faisal Shahzad Met Taliban Chief," dawn.com, 26 July 2010.

³⁵ Barron and Schmidt, "From."

³⁶ "Pakistan Acknowledges Faisal Shahzad Met Taliban Chief," dawn.com, 26 July 2010.

³⁷ "Pakistan Acknowledges Faisal Shahzad Met Taliban Chief," dawn.com, 26 July 2010.

³⁸ Richard Esposito, Chris Vlasto, and Chris Cuomo, "Sources: Shahzad Had Contact With Awlaki, Taliban Chief and Mumbai Massacre Mastermind," ABC News, May 6, 2010.

³⁹ Esposito et al, "Sources."

⁴⁰ Gendar et al, "Times."

⁴¹ Gendar et al, "Times."

would have caused a significant fireball [had it fully detonated]” and that it was able to “spray shrapnel and metal parts with enough force to kill pedestrians and knock out windows,” a statement that reinforced the fear that was gripping New York at the time.⁴² There was a fear that fertilizer found in the SUV could have made the explosion even more destructive. Later, police spokesman Paul Brownie stated that New York Police Department’s bomb experts believe the fertilizer “was not a type volatile enough to explode like the ammonium nitrate grade fertilizer used in previous terror attacks.”⁴³

To further illustrate just how alarmist the authorities were, the chief of staff of the White House National Security Council in an interview with PBS was quoted stating that the suspect in the Times Square bombing had tried to kill thousands of Americans.⁴⁴ This statistic is highly unlikely for the reasons mentioned above.

10. Coverage by the media

The media coverage is similar in some ways to the depiction of the Times Square car bombing by the authorities. It began with articles flooding the internet on May 1, 2010 which only released statements from authorities and a small description of what happened. There was no mention of Shahzad at the beginning, nor was there a pre-drawn conclusion that it was related to Muslim extremists. Yet, it was alarmist in their depiction of the bomb and the damage it could have caused as mentioned.

The *New York Times* immediately pooled information about Shahzad after it was found that he was the perpetrator and published a few articles with his life and background. The purpose of these articles seemed to be more to attempt for an unbiased analysis of why Shahzad would attempt a bombing, and what led to his fanaticism. Their conclusion was that it did not make sense, particularly focusing on the fact that he took advantage of the economic freedom as well as the freedom of opportunity in Connecticut, working in firms and providing for his family. Yet he left this for the purposes of retribution against the United States. As further information came to light, the *New York Times* was quick to acknowledge the accuracy of the new information.

Canadian columnist Dan Gardner criticizes talk shows, as well as CBC radio, for incorrectly informing their audiences of the nature of the bomb. He argues that the explosion of the media after any event related to terrorism is extremely dangerous as it plays into the hands of the terrorists. He quotes a talk radio host informing his audience that the bomb “could have killed hundreds of people, maybe thousands,” which Gardner explains, is impossible as the deadliest attack in history was a 12,000 pound truck bomb that killed 241 United States Marines in 1983. Furthermore, he discusses CBC’s radio afternoon drive show in which the host asked if “the fears of terrorism are a little overblown” to a security expert who insisted that fears were not overblown, and offered misleading statistics which inflated the threat of terrorism. Gardner mentions the “terrorism

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Hays and Hajela, “Times.”

⁴⁴ Dan Gardner, “Dangerous Media Explosion,” *Ottawa Citizen*, May 7, 2010.

industry” whom he argues are benefiting terrorists by reacting so strongly to everything. “Fear,” he argues, “is what terrorists want,” and he goes on to point out the irony that this bomb did not even detonate and yet still generated massive waves of fear, which is not helped by a hysterical response by authorities and journalists. He ends by quoting the chief of staff of the White House’s National Security Council in an interview with PBS stating that “the suspect in the Times Square bombing had tried to kill thousands of Americans.” Thus he argues that the media overall when compared to what was later learned about the Times Square car bombing, was much too alarmist.⁴⁵

11. Policing costs

There were roughly no policing costs other than standard detective police work after the bomb was discovered. The investigation took three days before Shahzad was caught. There was no investigation prior to the attack. He was traced from the two keys he left in hanging in the ignition, his house keys, as well as the keys to the Nissan Pathfinder and was identified in a photo lineup by the seller of the vehicle which led to his arrest.⁴⁶ It took a combination of the police, firemen, and Customs and Border Protection agents to catch him. A federal complaint was filed against Shahzad on May 4, and he waived his right to a speedy trial and was sentenced to life in prison on October 5, 2010.⁴⁷

It is important to note that there were no informants in this case, and law enforcement did not use any new technology to solve this case. They do not seem to have used anything that was not in place before the September 11 terrorist attack.

12. Relevance of the internet

The internet was crucial for Shahzad’s entrance into the domain of religious fanatical terrorism. He initiated contact with Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan over the internet. Through the initial connection, he was in communication with many jihadist contacts including Muslim cleric Anwar al-Awlaki, “a central figure in many recent domestic terror attempts.”⁴⁸

Shahzad utilized the internet for information purposes after he returned to America after his bomb training in Pakistan. He monitored the Times Square corner on the internet.⁴⁹

13. Are we safer?

Public safety has been improved in the sense that Shahzad is in jail. He indicated that he would have kept trying to blast through crowded areas until he was caught or killed. That he is now off the streets means that the potential for more death directly caused by him is gone.

⁴⁵ Gardner, “Dangerous Media Explosion.”

⁴⁶ CNN Wire Staff, “Times.”

⁴⁷ Baum, “Failed Times Square Bomber.”

⁴⁸ Esposito et al, “Sources.”

⁴⁹ Baum, “Failed Times Square Bomber.”

Shahzad's attack may have been a failure, but the potential for damage was substantial. Terrorists, in gambling terms, play the odds in the sense that they will employ little effort and low cost ways to train new terrorists like Shahzad, and send them in large numbers, and the odds are that there will be one success in the bunch.⁵⁰ Some argue that this should not be seen as a "one-off" event but rather as a part of an emerging pattern of terrorism.⁵¹

Although the attack was a failure, the potential for damage was substantial. An attack like this is obviously in no way too expensive for terrorists to emulate in the future given the ease of funding and training and ready access to public space. "Two payments totaling approximately \$12,000 were effortlessly transferred from overseas bank accounts to Shahzad via locations in Massachusetts and New York State."⁵² Organizations like Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan will have spent little energy and effort training these operatives. Given the extremely low cost of these operations, terrorist groups will continue to view U.S. homeland operations such as this one as feasible.⁵³ The terrorists understand that the failed plots also have huge payoffs in terms of publicity and attention in the media. So in the long-term sense, we are not that much safer because these attacks may well keep coming.

14. Conclusions

As Faisal Shahzad grew increasingly religious, he reached out and made contact with Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, and had he not been able to establish contact, he would never have had the training nor been given the support to attempt such an attack. However, that he acted as a lone wolf for the attack itself is, in its way, a unique and impressive feat.

The Times Square car bombing required substantial planning and training, and for the most part it was not picked up by any intelligence. It was solved not by any elaborate schemes involving informants, but rather by bystanders who noticed the smoking and popping and by detective work by law enforcement officials. Standard police vigilance and public alertness definitely play a role, but it seems that the most effective way to minimize the damage of potential terrorists is to keep them from making connections with other terrorist networks or organizations.⁵⁴

Terrorist groups may be beginning to realize the potential for low cost and energy efficient schemes that yield a high payoff. The high payoffs are constant publicity no matter the outcome, as well as the possibility of success, which generates more fear, and furthers the terrorists' goals of creating public unrest and advocating for change in government. Whether these payoffs come in the form of deaths or in the form of massive amounts of publicity, the terrorists are moved forward in their agenda. The publicity is not to be taken lightly as attention and fame create more legitimacy for the terrorist organization which will likely draw

⁵⁰ Bergen and Hoffman, "Report," 26.

⁵¹ Bergen and Hoffman, "Report," 26.

⁵² Bergen and Hoffman, "Report," 26.

⁵³ Bergen and Hoffman, "Report," 25.

⁵⁴ Michael A. Sheehan, "The Terrorist Next Door," *New York Times*, May 4, 2010.

more willing recruits for their endeavors. All the terrorists need to do is to succeed a few times on civilian targets, and each time they do succeed public morale, confidence, and even the economy are affected to a great extent. The case of Major Hasan, an Army psychiatrist who shot and killed 13 people while wounding 31 at Fort Hood, Texas, (Case 32) was less effective in terms of damaging public moral, confidence, and economy because the attack only included military targets.

The strength of Al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups in provoking massive amounts of media coverage must be countered by oversight in terms of overreaction in the American press. It is also necessary to have a balanced comparative approach when it comes to countermeasures, and for citizens and law enforcement to continue to be vigilant and alert concerning terrorism.