

Case 52: Bombing the Federal Reserve Bank

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Many of the would-be terrorists who populate these case studies can be characterized as “losers.” However, Quazi Mohammad Rezwanul Ahsan Nafis, aged 22 when he was arrested in 2012 for plotting to explode a FBI-supplied 1000-pound bomb at the Federal Reserve Bank in New York, may be the most impressive example—though Jose Pimentel (Case 48) may give him reasonable competition for the distinction.

Nafis sent an autobiographical letter to the Judge in his trial (appended to this case study) filled with self-deprecating remorse, and most of the independent evidence on the case suggests that he had his self-analysis just about right. He spent his whole life “trying to be someone,” he says, but this effort was “totally void of any success.” A failure from college in Bangladesh, he was sent by his parents with their last savings to the United States where he continued to flunk out.

What Nafis most exhibited, concludes Todd Ives, was a “craving for acceptance.” Becoming more desperate after being jilted by a girlfriend in Bangladesh, he espoused radical jihadist views and caught the attention of some FBI agents. They represented themselves as al-Qaeda and, suggests Ives, Nafis seems to have “just wanted to prove himself capable in the eyes” of the organization—it seems he had finally found a cult that would accept him. He was soon plotting to do “something big. Something very big. Very very very very big, that will shake the whole country... that will make us one step closer to run the whole world.” Seeking “to destroy America,” he decided that “targeting America’s economy” was the “most efficient way to draw the path of obliteration.”

He said he was willing to die in the attack. However, according to the Criminal Complaint, in that event he wanted to go back to Bangladesh “to see his family one last time and to set his affairs in order.”¹ In his letter, Nafis says the trip was “to see whether I find some hope from my family for living on this earth.” His fellow cultists were able to contain their enthusiasm for that idea, and Nafis says the agent “said he was going to cut me off,” something that Nafis said “really hurt.” He was told that the al-Qaeda higher-ups disapproved of such a trip but did authorize a remote controlled bombing after which Nafis could return home. He eagerly agreed with this brilliant idea.

In his letter to the Judge, Nafis ruefully notes that his father had “lost his job because of me” while expressing great pleasure with his court-appointed attorney who he found “not only a good lawyer but also a good person” and who “behaves with me like she is my aunt.”

The Judge was not quite so familial. She said that she did not believe Nafis to be a “hardened terrorist” and that she accepted his remorse as “genuine.”

¹ United States of America v. Nafis, Quazi Mohammed Rezwanul Ahsan, Complaint, 13.

But that, she said, “does not change the fact that he knew exactly what he was doing,” and gave him 30 years.² On the other hand, she could have given him a life sentence. If Nafis’ letter made that difference, it would be his first success in life.

² Mosi Secret, “30-Year Prison Sentence in Plot to Bomb U.S. Bank,” *New York Times*, August 9, 2013.

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1. Overview

Quazi Mohammad Rezwanul Ahsan Nafis, 22, was arrested in October of 2012 for attempting to blow up the Federal Reserve Bank in New York with what he believed to be a 1,000 pound super-bomb. The bomb was a fake, and Nafis had been under federal surveillance since he began hatching his plan to attack the United States in July of 2012. On August 9, 2013, he was sentenced to 30 years in prison for attempting to use a weapon of mass destruction and for providing material support to a terrorist organization. Nafis came to the United States from Bangladesh in January 2012 on a student visa with the inclination of carrying out a terrorist attack on U.S. soil. The would-be bomber tried to find assistance and camaraderie on the internet but ended up finding an FBI informant instead. The informant in turn notified an undercover agent of the FBI who pursued a sting operation on Nafis lasting only a few months. In October of 2012, Nafis and the undercover FBI agent assembled an inoperable explosive device which Nafis believed to be a bomb capable of extreme destruction. Nafis quickly found out that he was wrong after being escorted out of New York's financial district by FBI agents, the Federal Reserve Bank standing unscathed. Nafis' background and motivation is complex, if not misguided. Intent on declaring jihad, he came to America with instructions on how to make bombs out of household items, as well as an audio recording of Anwar al-Awlaki.¹ A self-described loner, Nafis never fell into the right crowd, a trend that continued in his partnership with undercover FBI agents.

2. Nature of the adversary

The majority of Nafis' life does not paint the picture of a prototypical terrorist suspect. Even his raising in Bangladesh, a Muslim-majority nation of 160 million people, does not immediately set off red flags. Its citizens certainly do not have the same level of global terrorism as Pakistan, with which it once formed a nation before independence in 1971.² Indeed, portraits of Nafi's life according to friends and family reveal conflicting images, but his peers were still universally shocked upon learning of his charges.

During his trial, Nafis penned a five page letter himself, describing his situation and pleading for mercy from District Judge Carol Amon. In his letter, Nafis states that from a young age he was constantly ridiculed for a stammer problem that has plagued him for years. He writes that he had neither real friends nor a good relationship with his parents. Nafis writes of himself: "I have grown up as a loner. I have spend (sic) my whole life trying to be someone. But I could not be anyone but a total disappointment to myself and my family... My life was

¹ Mosi Secret, "30-Year Prison Sentence in Plot to Bomb U.S. Bank," *New York Times*, August 9, 2013.

² Farid Hossain, "Quazi Mohammad Ahsan Nafis: Federal Reserve Terror Plot Shocks Family," *Huffington Post*, October 18, 2012.

totally void of any success.” Of course Nafis writes his letter to gain a lighter sentence from Judge Amon, but still, he offers the most in depth glance of his upbringing. Nafis continues to explain his coming of age saying that he fell into spending time with radical students as he had no other real friends. He explains that being with the radical students in Bangladesh made him misguided in regards to the teachings of Islam.³

To back up Nafis’ own testimony, it is documented that he was, in fact, severely struggling at least academically. Nafis was expelled from North South University in Bangladesh after failing on examinations. After failing his classes, he was given three months to improve his grades, but the university decided to expel him after not hearing from him. A spokesperson from the university reported that Nafis had been absent since December 2011.⁴

After this, Nafis’ persuaded his parents to send him abroad to the United States in what he termed as an attempt to improve his job outlook. Nafis’ father remarked that he had spent all of his savings to send him to America. Nafis ended up in Missouri, studying cybersecurity at Southeast Missouri State University, but he withdrew after one semester for poor grades, transferring to an unspecified school in Brooklyn.⁵ The university would not identify the school to which Nafis ultimately transferred.

During the summer of 2012, Nafis stated he went to Albany, New York, to find a job where his uncle lives, but he was unable to find work. Nafis later moved to Queens, New York, where once he found a job, he was unable to keep it. At this time, he began to feel mentally and physically unable to be successful. He described himself as “falling into a deep depression.” He also spoke of a girl in Bangladesh who had cheated on him, and said he “felt like the whole sky fell down over my head.”⁶ In the end, Nafis described himself as depressed but unable to kill himself because suicide was forbidden by Islamic law. Because of this limitation, Nafis said he “lost the ability to think straight, I went crazy. And that way I justified my killing myself with a jihadist act.”⁷

The difficulty in assessing Nafis’ character stems from the fact that he is the only person to provide an actual account of himself, and this account is biased since it is an attempt to sway a federal judge to hand down a more lenient sentence. Nafis’ identification with radical Islamism becomes difficult to trace as his peers and family never had a clue as to his extremist beliefs. Dion Duncan, a fellow student of Nafis in Missouri and a member of the same Muslim organization that Nafis also participated in noted that “Nafis was a good kid. He showed no traces of anti-Americanism, or death to America, or anything like that.

³ See Quazi Nafis, “Quazi Nafis’s letter to U.S. District Judge Carol Amon,” from *Newsday*, July 31, 2013. <http://www.newsday.com/news/new-york/quazi-nafis-s-letter-to-u-s-district-judge-carol-amon-1.5850943> See also the appendix to this case.

⁴ Dean Nelson, “New York Fed bomb plot: how Quazi Nafis became radicalized,” *Telegraph*, October 18, 2012.

⁵ Colleen Long, “Obama Was Allegedly Considered As A Target In Terrorism Plot,” *Huffington Post*, October 18, 2012.

⁶ Nafis, “Quazi Nafis’s letter,” 2.

⁷ Nafis, “Quazi Nafis’s letter,” 2.

He was a trustworthy honest kid.”⁸ Jim Dow, a 54-year-old Army veteran who rode home from class with Nafis twice a week said of the situation, “I can’t imagine being more shocked about somebody doing something like this.”⁹ He continued, “We talked quite a bit... And this doesn’t seem to be in character.”¹⁰ In fact, what interested Dow the most was that Nafis specifically talked about true Muslims not believing in violence.¹¹ Furthermore, according to family members, Nafis never showed any sign of radicalization when he was in Bangladesh.¹²

As stated, it is difficult to rectify the testimonials of Nafis’ closest peers and family members against his own testimony and even further with his own actions. Nafis is the only person to give an account of his radicalization, and this account must be tempered with the fact that it was intended to gain sympathy and portray him in a better light. It is true, though, that Nafis struggled to succeed in almost everything he did. He failed in the workplace, he failed in school, he had a tenuous relationship with his family, and he struggled to make friends. It is certainly possible that Nafis struggled with mental health after this failure. Thus, it logically flows that his purported depression could lead him to radicalize or fall into the wrong groups.

3. Motivation

As Nafis’ radicalization was so misguided and unexpected, his motivations for attacking the United States are equally difficult to assess. A criminal complaint filed by John Neas provides the most complete answer as to what drove Nafis to commit a terrorist attack on U.S. soil.¹³ Neas is a Special Agent with the Federal Bureau of Investigation who had been employed by the FBI for approximately two years at the time of Nafis’ arrest. He is assigned to the New York Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF) which is dedicated to investigating counterterrorism-related matters. In early July 2012 Nafis told a FBI confidential human source (CHS) that he admired Sheikh “O,” whom the CHS understood to be Osama bin Laden.¹⁴ Furthermore, Nafis told the CHS that he admired the magazine starting with “I,” which the CHS understood to be the al-Qaeda-affiliate-sponsored publication *Inspire*.¹⁵ Around the same time, Nafis described the United States to the CHS as “dar al-harb,” which means “land of war” in Arabic.¹⁶ Nafis indicated to the CHS that he believes it permissible to travel to the United States for solely two reasons: for “dawaa,” which means “preaching,” or

⁸ Long, “Obama Was Allegedly Considered.”

⁹ “SEMO classmate is shocked at terror subject’s arrest,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, October 19, 2012.

¹⁰ “SEMO classmate is shocked.”

¹¹ “SEMO classmate is shocked.”

¹² Nelson, “New York Fed bomb plot.”

¹³ See *United States of America v. Nafis, Quazi Mohammed Rezwanul Ahsan*, Complaint, *Investigative Project on Terrorism*, <http://www.investigativeproject.org/case/625>.

¹⁴ *United States of America v. Nafis*, Complaint, 4-5.

¹⁵ *United States of America v. Nafis*, Complaint, 4-5. *Inspire* is an English-language online magazine reported to be published by al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. The magazine includes recruiting material for al-Qaeda and provides information about how to carry out particular types of terrorist attacks.

¹⁶ *United States of America v. Nafis*, Complaint, 5.

for “J, which the CHS understood to mean “jihad.”¹⁷ Around August of 2012, Nafis told an Undercover FBI agent (UC) that he understood and was committed to al-Qaeda’s ideology.¹⁸ At the time of his attempted attack, he provided the UC with a thumb drive containing an article he had written about his motivations for the attack. In the article, Nafis quoted “[o]ur beloved Sheikh Osama bin Laden,” in justifying the murder of women and children in the attack.¹⁹ Nafis was hopeful that his article would eventually be published by *Inspire* magazine. Of course this was never a possibility.²⁰

Between citing Osama Laden, subscribing to the teachings of al-Qaeda and *Inspire* magazine, and listening to Anwar al-Awlaki, Nafis was clearly influenced by radical Islamic ideology. Interestingly, Nafis really never exhibited grievances toward the United States or U.S. policy. Perhaps Nafis was simply so captivated by these extremist messages. Clearly, Nafis admired *Inspire* magazine and even aspired to be featured in it. It could be the case that Nafis, a failure at everything, just wanted to prove himself capable in the eyes of al-Qaeda, an organization which he increasingly came to identify himself with.

4. Goals

As puzzling as Nafis’ case is, his goal was almost foolishly simple. Nafis was on record telling the UC that he just wanted “something big. Something very big. Very very very very big, that will shake the whole country... that will make us one step closer to run the whole world.”²¹ Nafis’ could not stress the magnitude of his planned attack enough, stating that he wanted to “do something that brothers coming after us can be inspired by us.”²² In August of 2012, Nafis first stated the idea of targeting New York’s financial district, specifically the New York Stock Exchange.²³ He wanted enough explosives to decimate the NYSE building in its entirety. Later Nafis would change his target to the New York Federal Reserve Bank. He also indicated that he was aware that such an attack would result in a large number of civilian casualties.²⁴ Nafis was unclear as to whether mass casualty was the goal, or simply that casualties were permissible.

In the aforementioned thumb drive article that Nafis wrote, he mentioned “all I had in my mind are (sic) how to destroy America... I came up to this conclusion that targeting America’s economy is [the] most efficient way to draw the path of obliteration of America as well as the path of establishment of Khilapha.”²⁵ He indicated that he picked the Federal Reserve Bank of New York because it was the largest by assets, most active by volume, and most influential

¹⁷ United States of America v. Nafis, Complaint, 5.

¹⁸ United States of America v. Nafis, Complaint, 5.

¹⁹ United States of America v. Nafis, Complaint, 16.

²⁰ United States of America v. Nafis, Complaint, 16. The thumb drive currently remains in FBI custody.

²¹ United States of America v. Nafis, Complaint, 8.

²² United States of America v. Nafis, Complaint, 9.

²³ United States of America v. Nafis, Complaint, 9.

²⁴ United States of America v. Nafis, Complaint, 13.

²⁵ United States of America v. Nafis, Complaint, 16.

of all the Federal Reserve Banks.²⁶ His goal was clear—to inflict as much damage on America as possible. He naively believed that he could dent America’s economy through targeting a Federal Reserve Bank. He was keen on making a statement, and he believed attacking New York’s Financial District would best serve this goal.

5. Plans for violence

In early July 2012, Nafis first contacted an FBI confidential human source (CHS) and subsequently attempted to recruit the CHS into a jihadist cell in order to carry out a terror attack on the United States.²⁷ Authorities reported that Nafis reached out to the CHS through the internet, although they never provided any further details regarding the contact. In a call placed to the CHS, Nafis informed the CHS that he was from Bangladesh and said that he came to the U.S. to wage jihad.²⁸ Nafis also mentioned that he was in communication with an individual in the United States, a co-conspirator.²⁹ The accomplice, who lived in San Diego, was later arrested on unrelated child-pornography charges.³⁰ The accomplice, Howard Willie Carter II, was placed under surveillance in San Diego as early as August 2012, but officials waited until after Nafi’s arrest to detain Carter on different charges.³¹ On July 6, 2012, Nafis revealed that he was in New York City and that he wanted to recruit others to join the group. He also discussed the possibility of “martyrdom” during the conversation.³² Between July 6 and 8, Nafis began to communicate via Facebook with the CHS, discussing the possibility of killing a high-ranking government official.³³

Nafis was introduced by the CHS to the undercover agent (UC) in mid-July 2012. Nafis was led to believe that the UC was an affiliate of al-Qaeda, and was eventually convinced that he was working for the terrorist group. Around August 5, Nafis stated that he was considering the New York Stock Exchange as a possible target.³⁴ By August 9, FBI agents conducting surveillance on Nafis observed him in the area of the Stock Exchange, assessing the suitability of the target.³⁵ On September 15, Nafis told the UC that he wanted multiple vehicles involved in the attack as well as the participation of other individuals.³⁶ He also indicated that he intended to kill himself in the attack, but he wanted to return to Bangladesh first to set his affairs in order.³⁷ A few days later, Nafis again met with the UC to identify possible storage spaces where he could assemble and hide

²⁶ United States of America v. Nafis, Complaint, 17.

²⁷ United States of America v. Nafis, Complaint, 4.

²⁸ United States of America v. Nafis, Complaint, 4.

²⁹ United States of America v. Nafis, Complaint, 5.

³⁰ Mosi Secret, “F.B.I. Arrests Second Suspect in Bomb Plot Against Bank,” *New York Times*, October 18, 2012.

³¹ Secret, “F.B.I. Arrests Second Suspect.”

³² United States of America v. Nafis, Complaint, 6.

³³ United States of America v. Nafis, Complaint, 6.

³⁴ United States of America v. Nafis, Complaint, 9.

³⁵ United States of America v. Nafis, Complaint, 9.

³⁶ United States of America v. Nafis, Complaint, 12.

³⁷ United States of America v. Nafis, Complaint, 12-13.

the bomb he was planning to construct.³⁸ Prior to the meeting, Nafis had scouted several potential storage locations, which he directed the UC to examine. Around this time, Nafis had also told the UC that he was considering attacking the New York Federal Reserve Bank, instead of, or addition to, the New York Stock Exchange.³⁹

In a September 27 meeting, the UC explained to Nafis that if he returned home, he risked having his terrorist plot detected by U.S. law enforcement and that al-Qaeda leaders did not authorize a return trip home to Bangladesh, but did authorize Nafis to use a remote-controlled explosive device, rather than a suicide attack so that Nafis could return home after the attack.⁴⁰ Nafis responded excitedly to the new plan to detonate an explosive device remotely because he believed it would allow him to conduct additional attacks on U.S. soil.⁴¹

On October 4, Nafis and the UC traveled to a warehouse in eastern New York that Nafis believed was suitable for storing the explosives.⁴² By this time, Nafis had already gathered numerous items for use in the explosive device, including batteries and other electrical components.⁴³ Nafis and the UC went on to purchase additional components to construct the explosive device. A week later, Nafis met the UC and transported what he believed to be explosive material to the warehouse.⁴⁴ In total, Nafis and the UC unloaded approximately twenty fifty-pound bags of the purported explosive material. The material, unbeknownst to Nafis, was inert and posed no actual threat to the safety of the public.⁴⁵ After this meeting, Nafis informed the UC that he had purchased a second cellphone for detonation of the device.⁴⁶ Nafis had also returned to the financial district another time, once again to scout the site of his upcoming attack.⁴⁷

On October 15, 2012, the UC called Nafis and informed him that they would be ready to proceed with the attack on October 17. Nafis stated that he was eager to proceed with the attack on that day.⁴⁸ On the morning of October 17, Nafis and the UC met and drove to the warehouse in a van the UC had acquired.⁴⁹ The pair drove to the warehouse to assemble what Nafis believed to be a one-thousand pound bomb. Nafis himself assembled the detonation device.⁵⁰ It remained unclear where he developed the skills to make the device. Nafis had also collected the empty bags of the inert explosive material and placed them in the van. He told the UC that he collected the extra bags because he believed there might be residual explosive material in them that could strengthen the bomb.⁵¹

³⁸ United States of America v. Nafis, Complaint, 13.

³⁹ United States of America v. Nafis, Complaint, 13.

⁴⁰ United States of America v. Nafis, Complaint, 14.

⁴¹ United States of America v. Nafis, Complaint, 15.

⁴² United States of America v. Nafis, Complaint, 15.

⁴³ United States of America v. Nafis, Complaint, 15.

⁴⁴ United States of America v. Nafis, Complaint, 16.

⁴⁵ United States of America v. Nafis, Complaint, 16.

⁴⁶ United States of America v. Nafis, Complaint, 17.

⁴⁷ United States of America v. Nafis, Complaint, 17.

⁴⁸ United States of America v. Nafis, Complaint, 17.

⁴⁹ United States of America v. Nafis, Complaint, 17.

⁵⁰ United States of America v. Nafis, Complaint, 18.

⁵¹ United States of America v. Nafis, Complaint, 18-19.

Nafis and the UC then drove the van from the warehouse to the New York Federal Reserve Bank, parked the vehicle, and walked to a nearby hotel. Once inside the hotel room, Nafis requested to film a video statement for the attack. The UC obliged, and in the statement Nafis declared “we will not stop until we attain victory or martyrdom.” Nafis then placed several phone calls to the detonation device. These calls were observed by the UC and also captured by a court-authorized pen register/tap and trace devices placed inside the cellphones used for detonation. To be sure, FBI agents also inspected the van to visually confirm that the detonator had been activated. After confirmation, Nafis was arrested.⁵²

Nafis was eventually indicted on two counts. The first count was the attempt to use a weapon of mass destruction, an explosive bomb, against persons and property within the United States: one or more facilities of interstate and foreign commerce, the New York Federal Reserve.⁵³ The second count was the attempt to provide material support, including communications equipment, explosives, and personnel to a foreign terrorist organization, al-Qaeda.⁵⁴ As noted, Nafis eventually plead guilty and was sentenced to 30 years in prison.

From the very beginning, Nafis was working with FBI agents and never had a chance of actually attacking the United States. Nafis may have come to the U.S. with intent to terrorize, but it is difficult to assess the likelihood that he would have carried out a terrorist attack without the aid of undercover agents. Judge Amon was convinced that Nafis was capable of executing “this plan or something similar, perhaps a less grand one, had he not been discovered.”⁵⁵ Nafis had no formal training, but certainly had the rudimentary ability to construct at least small scale explosives. There is no question that Nafis was committed to his cause, and he actively sought an al-Qaeda connection to facilitate his terrorist plot. It is likely that Nafis would have attempted at least some attack had he not been thwarted by undercover agents. Would the attack have been on the scale of a thousand-pound bomb? Probably not.

6. Role of informants

Informants played a crucial role in discovering, developing, and ultimately thwarting Nafis’ terrorist plot aspirations. At least one confidential source was involved in the sting operation as well as at least one undercover agent. Furthermore, a surveillance team was used and the Joint Terrorism Task Force was involved. The exact logistics of the operation were never released or made explicitly clear, but no insignificant amount of personnel was used in this case. Investigators would not comment as to how Nafis initially came into contact with the informant, and thus little information is available regarding his role.⁵⁶ The undercover agent (UC) was instrumental in Nafis’ arrest. The only name of an

⁵² United States of America v. Nafis, Complaint, 19.

⁵³ United States of America v. Nafis, Quazi Mohammed Rezwanul Ahsan, Indictment. *Investigative Project on Terrorism*, <http://www.investigatveproject.org/case/625>.

⁵⁴ United States of America v. Nafis, Indictment.

⁵⁵ Secret, “30-Year Prison Sentence in Plot to Bomb U.S. Bank.”

⁵⁶ Long, “Obama Was Allegedly Considered.”

individual involved in the operation that was released was John Neas. Aside from this, little information exists regarding informants and undercover agents.

The undercover agents struck an even balance in helping Nafis develop his plot, but not leading him too far. Although suggestions were made from time to time, Nafis by and large took the lead on most of the operation. Entrapment did not seem to be an issue in this case as Nafis intent was unquestionable, and he had been the architect for most of the plot. The largest input that the UC made was telling Nafis that he could not fly home to Bangladesh and that he should use a remote detonation device rather than a suicide bomb. This did not seem to be an issue of entrapment as Nafis was ecstatic at the idea and even remarked that this would allow him to carry out future terrorist attacks. In sum, informants played a huge role in discovering Nafis and facilitating his plot without interfering to the point of entrapment. Without informants, Nafis could have potentially contacted nefarious agents and been potentially dangerous.

It is also of note the extreme trust the agents developed in their relationship with Nafis. In his letter, Nafis states that it is almost unbelievable how nice the agents were to him from day one, and he even said he felt like a “younger brother” to them.⁵⁷ Again, Nafis writes his letter to praise America and gain sympathy, but there is something to be stated of the respect he retains toward to the undercover agents even after they turned him in. The agents’ job must be commended in that they saw Nafis’ craving for acceptance, and they played off of it to cement their credibility as al-Qaeda agents in Nafis eyes.

7. Connections

According to federal official, Nafis had no known ties to al-Qaeda.⁵⁸ Although steeped in radical Muslim ideology, Nafis had no connection to terrorist groups either in the United States or Bangladesh. He was entirely self-motivated, and although he tried to reach out to al-Qaeda, he ultimately failed. Nafis did have one connection to a co-conspirator in California but he was not revealed to have any connection to terrorist groups either and was ultimately arrested on charges of child pornography. Certainly a terrorist cell was not operating in this case, but Nafis did have some relation to terrorist organizations in reading publications such as al-Qaeda’s *Inspire*.

8. Relation to the Muslim community

Nafis hailed from a Muslim country and says he began radicalizing after falling on hard times in school. Interestingly, he was involved in a non-radical Muslim organization at Southeast Missouri State. As mentioned, he also told people that Islam was a nonviolent religion. Ultimately, Nafis became swayed enough by the extremist Muslim ideology to attempt a terrorist attack.

Needless to say, the Muslim community, especially the Bangladeshi faction did not react favorably to Nafis’ actions. Bangladeshis rallied a few days after his arrest in Queens, New York, to condemn the actions of the would-be bomber. The Bangladeshi community cautioned against others condemning their

⁵⁷ Nafis, “Quazi Nafis’s letter,” 2.

⁵⁸ Long, “Obama Was Allegedly Considered.”

own community for the actions of one person. About 100 Bangladeshis rallied at the event, demanding swift justice of Nafis. The community was puzzled about Nafis' attempt to commit a terrorist attack against the United States, and Sajda Solaiman, vice president of the Bangladesh Association of America Inc., commented that he had "never heard of anybody from Bangladesh being involved with anything like this."⁵⁹

9. Depiction by the authorities

The authorities largely kept this case under wraps. They chose not to create a big stir about the whole ordeal and only issued a few statements from arrest to sentencing. John Carlin, Acting Assistant Attorney General for National Security simply stated, "With the sentence handed down today, Rezwanul Nafis is being held accountable for his attempt to carry out a terrorist attack on U.S. soil. I applaud my agents, analysts, and prosecutors who ensured that his deadly plans never came to fruition and who are responsible for today's successful outcome."⁶⁰ Most of the authorities' reaction was in praise of their counterterrorism units rather than anything directed at Nafis. U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of New York, Lorreta E. Lynch stated that Nafis' "extensive efforts to strike at the heart of the nation's financial system were foiled by effective law enforcement. We will use all of the tools at our disposal to stop any such attack before it can occur."⁶¹

The authorities' response to this case was responsible. They tried to keep the case from becoming overblown, and they managed it well from that standpoint. Quite simply, the authorities largely kept the case on the hush. They responded swiftly and effectively to Nafis throughout the entire operation and subsequent trial without causing a stir.

10. Coverage by the media

Because Nafis' bomb plot failed to come to fruition, the media never really went wild with his story. Most of the publications came out either around Nafis arrest or around the time of his sentencing with almost nothing in between. The story was covered by most of the United States' major national news sources and all of New York's major news outlets. The story was also covered by Bangladeshi news outlets such as *Bangla News 24* and *The Daily Star*. Both of these newspapers are among Bangladesh's most prominent English news sources. Most of the news sources covered the story accurately as it developed. Because so little information was released by the authorities, the newspapers only had basic facts to report. The largest source of information came from court documents themselves by large margin.

11. Policing costs

⁵⁹ Igor Kossov, "Bangladeshis condemn Fed bomb plot suspect," *Newsday*, October 21, 2012.

⁶⁰ United States of America v. Nafis, Quazi Mohammed Rezwanul Ahsan, Sentencing Press Release, *Investigative Project on Terrorism*, <http://www.investigativeproject.org/case/625>.

⁶¹ United States of America v. Nafis, Quazi Mohammed Rezwanul Ahsan, Arrest Press Release, *Investigative Project on Terrorism*, <http://www.investigativeproject.org/case/625>.

Nafis case was a sting operation that lasted only several months, and only involved a few agents on the ground. As stated, there was a confidential informant, an undercover agent, and at least one surveillance team that monitored Nafis as he scouted out locations for his bomb. The Joint Terrorism Task Force office was also involved. In total, it is difficult to put a number on the amount of agents used in the operation. Although no figures were released by authorities, the case was relatively open and shut. Policing costs over the several-month sting involved a few undercover agents at least and purchased bomb supplies. There is no telling what dollar amount these costs added up to as the finer details of the case were never revealed. Nafis was arrested in late October 2012 and was sentenced in August of 2013. Thus the case made its way through the courts in less than ten months.

12. Relevance of the internet

The internet was definitely a factor in this case, but the degree to which it was relevant was never reported fully by the authorities. Facebook was mentioned specifically as a communication device between the confidential source and Nafis. It is unreported, though, to what extent social media was used for communication purposes. It was also stated that Nafis had used the internet to contact al-Qaeda, but again authorities never revealed how exactly they came into contact with Nafis. In regards to communication between Nafis and the undercover agent, most of the meetings took place in person, and phone calls were also exchanged. The best that can be said of the relevance of the internet and specifically social media is that it played a role, but the full extent of that role is unknown to the public

13. Are we safer?

U.S. attorney Lynch perhaps best answers the question of are we safer in stating, “Nafis came to the United States radicalized and bent on fighting jihad here in our homeland. He sought to commit mass murder in downtown Manhattan in the name of al-Qaeda. The prospect of widespread death and destruction could not dissuade his deadly plan. Nafis’ goals of martyrdom and carnage were thwarted by the vigilance of law enforcement.”⁶² Lynch articulates Nafis’ case well. It is hard to tell exactly how dangerous he was because he had no real ties to any terrorist organization. Still he was steeped in Islamic radicalism and was determined to attack the United States in some form. At any time Nafis could have backed out of this operation, but instead he chose to increase the magnitude of death and destruction he wished to accomplish.

Nafis came to the United States with instructions and how to build a bomb and only gained momentum from there. There is no doubt that Nafis was a threat to the general public. Even if he was unable to build a thousand-pound super-bomb, he still was capable of inflicting damage on the populace. Law enforcement officials were diligent in pursuing a radical individual bent on attacking the United States, and the country is indeed safer for it.

⁶² US v. Nafis, Sentencing Press Release.

14. Conclusions

Quazi Nafis presents an interesting case in that he grew up a seemingly normal kid in a country that was not well-known for terrorist activity. It seems almost by chance that Nafis fell into a radical Islamic tradition. By his own account, he was just looking for any sort of acceptance, and apparently extremism afforded it to him. Through his college years, Nafis was downtrodden, leaping from failure to failure academically and in the job marketplace. He attests that this series of failures made him depressed, and allowed him to rationalize a jihadist attack on the United States. Ultimately, Nafis did not know what he was getting himself into. An amateur with no connections to terrorist organizations, Nafis fell right into the FBI's hands. When he thought he struck gold with al-Qaeda, Nafis began planning what he thought would be his first success in life, a major terrorist attack on U.S. soil. Little did Nafis know, though, that this would be his swansong in a long list of failures.

Nafis' case illustrates just how diligent the government must be in assessing potential terrorist suspects. Nafis, by all accounts, was a normal person who did not hold nonviolent beliefs. In a relatively short amount of time though, Nafis shocked his family and peers by being arrested in a bomb-plot. His case reveals what can push a seemingly normal person into a jihadist mentality.

Somewhat unique to Nafis' ordeal is that he offers his own account of his actions, and actually expresses remorse, at least on paper, for what he tried to do. In his letter to Judge Amon pleading for sympathy, Nafis wrote, "I am extremely sorry for what I have tried to do is a terrible thing. The only thing that comforts me now, is nobody was hurt because of my stupidity."⁶³ Nafis even renounces radical ideology stating, "I do not believe in the Radical version of Islam anymore. I hate it from the bottom of my heart... I will always regret for my support for it which partly lead me to a crazy act. My remorse for my actions will never cease until my departure from this earth."⁶⁴ Nafis goes on to blame the misfortunes of his life for his actions. He states that without these misfortunes, he would have never fallen into radical Islam and would never have committed such atrocities.⁶⁵ Nafis' account of his actions is interesting to say the least. Judge Amon remarked that she did not believe Nafis was a hardened terrorist and accepted his remorse as genuine.⁶⁶ Still she believed that this did not change the fact that he knew exactly what he was doing. Regardless of what led Nafis down this path—depression, the search for acceptance, mental instability—Nafis time and time again showed his willingness to kill civilians and attempt to bring down America's economy. From that standpoint, federal officials were right to pursue Nafis as diligently as they did because he was more than willing to inflict damage upon the United States, no matter the scale of the attack that he was capable of.

Appendix: Quazi Nafis's letter to U.S. District Judge Carol Amon

⁶³ Nafis, "Quazi Nafis's letter," 1.

⁶⁴ Nafis, "Quazi Nafis's letter," 1.

⁶⁵ Nafis, "Quazi Nafis's letter," 3.

⁶⁶ Secret, "30-Year Prison Sentence in Plot."

July 31, 2013

The Honorable Carol Bagley Amon
Chief United States District Judge
Eastern District of New York

Dear Judge Amon,

I am Quazi Mohammed Rezwanul Ahsan Nafis. I am extremely sorry for what I have tried to do is a terrible thing. The only thing that comforts me now, is nobody was hurt because of my stupidity.

I do not believe in the Radical version of Islam anymore. I hate it from the bottom of my heart. It is purely evil and inhumane. It is not Islam at all. I will always regret for my support for it which partly lead me to a crazy act. My remorse for my actions will never cease until my departure from this earth.

Please accept from me the following not only as vivid explanation for my present feeling of remorse for my actions but as a clear acceptance of responsibility and understanding for the crime I am being sentenced for committing, as well as a plea for leniency and forgiveness from Your Honor.

My actions are inexcusable and cowardly. After giving a deep thought I truly hate my actions and know that I will never pursue such behavior again that is not only un-Islamic but also destroyed my family and my life. On top of that I am hanging my head low because of the irony of my life story and how I end up in this situation

At a very young age I was a serious stammerer and my serious stammering problem has been going on for years. [REDACTED] I had no real friends. I did not have good relation with my parents. I have grown up as a loner. I have spend my whole life trying to be someone. But I could not be anyone but a total disappointment to myself and my family. I was like nothing but a lost project for my parents. All their efforts on me turned out to be fruitless. My life was totally void of any success.

For being a very simple guy I fall for people very easily. At my university in Bangladesh I did not have any real friends. So, when the radical students, who were influential and famous, were being nice to me I fell for them very easily. Being with them and listening to them I was becoming religious but never realized that I was being misguided slowly but surely with the wrong teachings of Islam.

In search of success in my life I came to USA to be able to stand own my own feet not being a burden of my family anymore. I hoped to earn money to support my living cost

and educational expenses in USA. I never managed to achieve either of the courses rather I was causing my parents spend more money on me. In order to save money I transferred poor grades from the university at Bangladesh to South east Missouri State University which resulted in my suspension from the university. I came to Albany, New York for finding a job where my uncle lives at but was not successful finding one. But could not stay over there long because of my aunt's disapproval. Then I came to Jamaica, Queens at Sonia's place who is my distant relative. I found some jobs but could not continue any of those. I started to feel like someone who was physically and mentally disable to be successful. It is just like I could not cope up with the fast competitive world. I was falling into deep depression.

Furthermore, one day I had a very heated argument with the father of Sonia and he slandered me with the worst words for my simple mistake. After that living at her place started to become impossible for me. Again, there was a girl in Bangladesh I used to care about and with who I was seeing my future with. I found out that she was cheating on me. ~~The~~ I lost the last comfort from my heart when I got to know about that. I felt like the whole sky fell down over my head. I thought that there was no place for me in this earth neither was there anything for me to give a reason to stay alive.

I could not kill myself which is forbidden in Islam. I lost the ability to think straight, I went crazy. And that way I justified my killing myself with a jihadist act. After a while I met the informant and undercover agents and expressed my desire. I went on with my crazy plan. I wanted to go to Bangladesh before my committing jihadist act to see whether I find some hope from my family for living in this earth. But the agent told me that he was going cut me off. I was really hurt and then I said to myself that if I had hope in Bangladesh I would never even come to America. So, I stayed in America and did whatever I thought was required to be done the leave the earth as early as possible.

After being arrested I had a lot of time study about Islam. I read the whole Quran which I did not read before being in prison. The more I read the more I realized I was blindly following those radical people and the lecturer I was listening to. I did not find a single verse to support my actions in the Noble Quran. Everyday passes by I thank Allah that I never met any real guy. If the agents had not found me I do not know what would have happened. I thank America from saving me from utter self-destruction.

I started talking to the agents same day I got arrested and went to a proffer meeting within a few days. From the very first day the agents were nice with me which was almost unbelievable to me. I was sharing jokes with them. I remember I told them that my favorite movie was "American Pie." During the proffer meetings they used to treat me like a younger brother. I remember one time I was feeling really cold. One of the agents gave me his own jacket to wear so that I do not feel cold. They used to ask me what kind of food I wanted to have for lunch. After the food was brought we all used to have food like a family. I was thinking again and again that I was being told by the radicals that America hate Muslims but

how nicely I was being treated even though they know I was the one tried to blow up Federal Reserve Bank!

I remember one other time I told them I wanted to have halal chicken. After a while an agent informed me that there was no halal chicken that day and asked me if I wanted halal lamb. I was surprised by the honesty and respect he showed towards me. I feel like America follows more rules of Islam more than that of Muslim countries.

My experience at MDC has helped me a lot to change my complete view towards America. When I was at the SHU, it was some of the worst days in my life. Even though in those hard days I found all kinds of help I needed from the SHU lieutenant. She was very kind to me and was sincere advisor. In general population I have been able to communicate with the Americans. At the beginning it was hard to get used to the environment but gradually when inmates here found out my real nature they became friendly with me. The thing I like about MDC is that everybody is being treated fairly and equally. I remember during the Christmas eve MDC provided us "Holiday Package." I was happy and surprised to get that package. Thinking even I, who went against America got the package; they were wishing us "Happy Holidays" while giving the package. After going back to my cell with the package I was sad and felt really sorry for my action. I was asking myself that the America that believes in equality and justice, why I had to go against this nation.

At MDC we, Muslims, can pray congregation prayers. Everybody is very respectful towards religion such as counselors, COs, unit manager, inmates. In this month of fasting COs wake us up around 3:30 AM. Again, MDC provides us with special food for starting and breaking out fast. Furthermore, at MDC I am being provided with such delicious food and different kinds of fruits such as turkey, beef stew, peach, I have never had before.

America has provided me with a free and good lawyer, Heidi C. Cesare. Another sign that I find America to treat people fairly and equally. My lawyer Heidi, is not only a good lawyer but also a good person. During my stay at the SHU, she used to visit me very often. They was the only medium of communication for me with my family when I was at the SHU. She has tried to understand me very much. She behaves with me like she is my aunt.

The MDC is the first place I have been able to discuss radical Islam with people who are not radical. After studying Quran and talking to some knowledgeable Muslims here I am totally convinced at how wrong I was in my actions. In Islam there is no place for it. If I had not been afflicted with the misfortunes of my life I would never have ended up doing such jihadist action because I never really believed in radical Islam from my heart. None of my family members support it. Now I have realized how much radicals misinterpret Islam. It is not America who is the enemy of Islam but it is the radicals who are the enemies of Islam and the Muslims.

In prison I remember the days I forgot about the good days I had in America that I had totally forgotten while I completely lost hope of living and started supporting radical Islam. I forgot about my life at Cape Girardeau in Missouri. Cape Girardeau is a very beautiful place. People over there are the nicest and the friendliest people on earth to me. I remember one day I along with another Bangladeshi guy was looking for an ATT store. On the way we met an old couple who told us that we had been heading toward wrong direction. We realized that we were very far away from our destination. The old couple offered us to give a ride. They not only took us to the store but also waited until we were done with our business over there and gave us a ride home. They were treating us like we had been their own grandsons.

There was another lady at a pet store, right across to the street where I used to live. She was really nice and kind to me and very respectful toward my religion. She told me that she would help me find a job at the SEMU. Furthermore, I remember another veteran in my physics class who used to give me a ride to my apartment almost everyday after the class had been finished. He gave me a calculator worth of \$100, when he got to know that I did not have one. He was like a friend of mine.

Alas! I miss those days badly. I wish I never got suspended from SEMU. I am such an ill-fated person I have no words to explain to lady at the pet store and the veteran, who used to care about me, how sorry I am for my actions. Woe to me! I will never get back to the love I had from them.

Truly after being in prison, my viewpoint towards America has really changed. I want to say to Your Honor, I love Americans. I wish I had been little bit patient with myself to change my fortune and judge all the Americans with my own judgement not other people's judgment. Now when I look back I hate myself. I cannot imagine what I was going to do. I was totally out of my mind. I am really lucky that the agents got me and saved me from utter self destruction giving me a chance to find a new meaning in my life and did not let me to fall into wrong hands.

In prison I have full right to practice my religion. I am learning Islam, the right Islam here. I have become more religious after being here at MDC. I am memorizing chapters of the Noble Quran. I keep myself busy at MDC by praying, reading books, watching TV, socializing.

Your Honor, I am the only son of my parents. My sister is already married. My father is 63 and my mother is 52 years of age. I have very good communication with my family. My parents love me very much. I never realized how much I love my parents neither and I realize how much they love me before getting arrested. I have found a hope for living again in this earth because of the love my parents have showed me even though I broke their

hearts committing this terrible crime. They have given me new meaning of life filled with love and peace. It feels to me like I have been raised from the dead because I was totally dead inside. I wanted to die more than anything in this world. Now I feel alive again inside my heart. Now I want to live more than anything in this world, specially for my parents because they are everything in my life, without them I am nothing.

I have no idea how much disappointment I am to my parents, still my parents love me. My father has lost his job because of me. My parents are living of their savings and sending me money from that savings too. Almighty God only knows how long they are going to be able to do it. There is none to take care of my old parents. Your Honor, I need to go to them as early as possible. They are the greatest gift from Almighty God to me. I live everyday on the hope that I will be able to go back to them one day before their departure from this earth. Please, do not let me lose that hope of living anymore. I request you to forgive me and give me another chance.

Your Honor, I have made a grave mistake. Please have mercy on me. Please consider my life situation before you sentence me. I am a simple, calm and quite person who has ended up doing one of the most violent crimes in the history of human civilization. Your Honor, I sincerely request you to forgive me for my grave crime. I apologize to You and through you to all the people of the whole America especially those who work at and around the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. Your Honor, please give me hope of living again. I beg You to have mercy on me. Forgive me, please.

Most humbly yours,

Nafis
7.1.13

Quazi Mohammed Rezwanul Ahsan Nafis
Reg. No. 81710-053
Metropolitan Detention Center