

May 15, 2010

## A New Chapter: Al Qaeda ‘Force Multipliers’ Lone Wolves, Homegrown Terrorists and the Pakistan Connection

*On May 2, 2010, the United Nations conference to strengthen the treaty to halt the spread of nuclear weapons and prevent nuclear technologies and materials from falling into the hands of terrorists commenced in New York City. However, while diplomats from all over the world — including the 189 signatories of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty — were posturing in the rarified air at the United Nations Headquarters in Midtown Manhattan, another drama was unfolding. A monumental investigation had begun just blocks away following the May 1 failed car bombing in Times Square, the tourist and theatrical center of America’s largest, most bustling metropolis. This event was ominously reminiscent of the failed bombings that occurred in 2007 near Piccadilly Circus in the center of London and at the airport in Glasgow, Scotland.*

*The goal of this latest attack was as simple as it was clear: to inspire fear, create havoc and take innocent lives. This latest bombing attempt is also a timely reminder that all the talk about the war on terror being over is no less than sheer unfounded nonsense. The reality is that plots against the United States continue to be hatched and inspired in places such as Pakistan and Yemen. A car bomb in Times Square, even a failed one, is also yet another vivid reminder of the enemy’s fixation on New York City, which remains a tempting target for terrorists.*

*Soon after the attack in Times Square, a Taliban group in Pakistan claimed credit for this attempted bombing. At the same time, however, some experts deduced that the failed attack was the work of an amateurish lone wolf. Within 53 hours of the attempted bombing, the situation became clearer when authorities arrested Faisal Shahzad — a 30-year-old naturalized citizen residing in Connecticut — embarking on a flight bound for Dubai, United Arab Emirates. His final destination was to be Pakistan, where he spent several months last summer with his family in the southern port city of Karachi. Shahzad admitted to the attempted attack and revealed that he learned the art of bomb making at a camp in Pakistan.*

*During the past year, The Lipman Report® has presciently focused on the terrorism threat projected onto American soil from abroad — most recently from Yemen and Pakistan — and described how al Qaeda has morphed into a horizontal organization that has franchised its terrorist operations, using an intensive*

*global propaganda campaign to propel lone wolves such as Shahzad into action. In fact, it was the October 15, 2009, issue — “Terrorism on Main Street” — in which The Lipman Report® first warned of this exact scenario — local jihadists acting on their own within the United States to create chaos and terror, using the kind of smaller-scale methods that can more easily escape detection from authorities. The theme of the dangers of homegrown terrorists and lone wolves was explored more extensively in the November and December 2009 issues. This current issue of The Lipman Report® will again focus on these escalating concerns and the Pakistani connection, all of which are becoming increasingly frequent and dangerous challenges for counterterrorism authorities.*

### Force Multipliers

One of al Qaeda’s goals when it attacked the United States on September 11, 2001, was to bring about what the United States most wants to avoid — provoking America into blundering into the region, enraging populations and uniting Middle East regimes into a transcontinental Islamic caliphate. Subsequent military campaigns have since gutted the al Qaeda core’s ability to plot attacks. However, al Qaeda franchises have been following the exhortations of Nasir al-Wahayshi — a senior al Qaeda operative in Yemen — who advocates using simple attacks against a variety of targets. In order to carry the terror war to the United States, this large group of organizations — stretching from one end of the Muslim world to the other — has been fervently proselytizing its agenda in an attempt to recruit anyone with unsuspecting access to the United States as lone wolves and homegrown terrorists, as force multipliers for al Qaeda. Some have been dangerous on a larger scale — such as David Headley, the Chicago-based United States citizen who helped orchestrate the 2008 Mumbai attacks — some were less effective — such as Jihad Jane, the Philadelphia-based American citizen who was recruiting for al Qaeda — and some, such as Faisal Shahzad, Najibullah Zazi of the 2009 New York City subway plot, and Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab of the December 25, 2009, attempted airliner bombing, almost succeeded in executing catastrophic acts of terror.

We live in a free and open society, which makes terrorist attacks easier to conduct. We also live in a technologically advanced society, which makes terrorist attacks more difficult to plan and execute without discovery. Our war on terror pits a high-tech society

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against a low-tech enemy, a contrast that was illuminated early this month in the paradox between the high-level debates at the United Nations regarding nuclear terrorism and the investigation of the makeshift bomb a mere few minutes away.

### Why Car Bombs?

Since 9/11, car bombs have wreaked varying degrees of havoc on an almost daily basis in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan. The car bomb is an enormously effective and lethal terrorist weapon because of its everyday quality and mobility. The official terminology for a car or truck bomb is “vehicle-borne improvised explosive device,” or VBIED, and the reason the car is often used in this capacity — rather than a boat or plane — is because cars are everywhere and can deliver the weight of a bomb. From 1970 through 2007, terrorists used car bombs at least 1,495 times; 876 occurred in the Middle East and North Africa, 212 in Western Europe and 163 in South Asia. Among the biggest perpetrators were the Irish Republican Army, the Basque Fatherland and Freedom in Spain, the Taliban, and al Qaeda in Mesopotamia.

There is also rising concern regarding the expanding use of makeshift bombs beyond the war zones of Iraq and Afghanistan, as evidenced by the improvised explosive device (IED) found in the Nissan Pathfinder in Times Square. Those recently arrested in the United States learned to make IEDs during their training in Afghanistan and Pakistan camps and planned to use them in their plots. Pakistan has experienced the most pronounced escalation of IEDs dating from 2007, after the Pakistani military mounted an eight-day siege to end a long standoff with Islamic extremists. There are roughly 300 IED cases a month outside of Iraq and Afghanistan. Unfortunately, these extremists are not only increasing the power of their devices, but are showing a grim cleverness in their delivery systems.

The IED is a tempting, low-cost option for jihadists. The Times Square incident is the first car bomb terror attack orchestrated by jihadists on United States soil, one that did not end in catastrophe only because the terrorist used the wrong type of fertilizer and fireworks. However, car and truck bombs have been employed for years with devastating effects against American interests abroad, as evidenced by the lethal attacks on the American Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in

1998, the Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia in 1996 and the Marine barracks in Lebanon in 1983.

### The Lone Wolf and the Homegrown Terrorist

As the New York case reminds us, there are people out there with the intent to kill. The incident has given rise to a much-needed discussion about the threat of “homegrown” and “lone wolf” violence in the United States. “Homegrown” terrorists are natives or longtime residents who belong to groups that espouse a particular agenda or radical ideology. “Lone wolf” terrorists, on the other hand, usually operate by themselves and are not formally associated with a movement, though they may have received training or ideological education from these groups. “Homegrown” and “lone wolf” terrorists are people who live and move among us every day, secretly working in their basements or garages devising and building bombs or other dangerous weapons.

It is very difficult to interdict the activities of a lone wolf, as they generally exist well below the radar. Some of the better known American lone wolves who were finally identified and arrested — after causing a great deal of damage — were Theodore Kaczynski, Eric Rudolph and Timothy McVeigh. The Unabomber, Theodore Kaczynski, lived in a shack in the mountains of Montana, and during his 17 years in isolation sent 16 package bombs that killed three people and wounded 23 others. Despite an ongoing FBI investigation, Kaczynski operated freely until a relative recognized his writings and alerted authorities. Eric Rudolph set off bombs at the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta, a gay bar and several abortion clinics. Another massive investigation eventually identified him as the bomber; however he remained a fugitive for more than five years, hiding in the Appalachian Mountains until an alert police officer recognized him in 2003. The worst terrorist event on American soil prior to the attacks on 9/11, however, occurred in Oklahoma City in 1995, carried out by “lone wolf” Timothy McVeigh. McVeigh, who operated with a very small cell, managed to construct a powerful truck bomb to carry out a devastating bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City that killed 168 people.

Fortunately, these men — in terms of determination and ability — were the exceptions. Most lone wolves are as incompetent as they are disturbed, and their attacks, like the one in Times Square, tend to fail or cause minimal damage. Nevertheless, we may be in the incipient

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stages of an epidemic of radicalized lone wolves, homegrown and foreign, putting great pressure on the resources of the counterterrorism authorities and affording these individuals greater opportunity to successfully carry out an attack prior to being identified and arrested. And lone wolves — like Shahzad — inspired and trained by a larger organization such as al Qaeda in Pakistan pose an infinitely greater threat.

#### **Faisal Shahzad: Who and Why?**

Like many of the Pakistani-Americans who have recently faced terrorism accusations in the United States, Faisal Shahzad was born in Pakistan's Northwest Frontier Province. He moved to the United States at age 18 with an F-1 Student Visa to study computer science and engineering at the University of Bridgeport in Connecticut. In April 2002, he was granted an H1-B visa for skilled workers, under which he resided in the United States for another three years. Shahzad then worked for an international marketing company in Norwalk, Connecticut, from 2006 until 2009. During October 2008, he reported his marriage to Huma Asif Mian, a United States citizen of Pakistani ethnicity, born in Colorado and graduate of the University of Colorado. He became a naturalized American citizen on April 17, 2009.

When law enforcement officials reviewed his recent travels, one trip in particular stood out: Shahzad left New York for Dubai on June 2, 2009, and remained overseas for eight months — reportedly in Pakistan — returning to the United States on February 3, 2010. The investigation to date has revealed that both Shahzad and his wife kept a very low profile, lived quiet and unremarkable lives and were not active in any political or religious group in the United States or Pakistan.

Subsequent to his arrest, Shahzad told authorities he received bomb-making training in the tribal region of Waziristan on the Afghanistan border during his lengthy stay in Pakistan last year. South Waziristan is currently the site of an ongoing Pakistani military offensive against Islamic militants affiliated with al Qaeda. However, Shahzad's confession suggests the region remains a threat, despite intensive military assaults and CIA operations.

Many details surrounding Shahzad's attempt to bomb New York's Times Square are hard to reconcile. Why would someone who spent a decade pursuing United States citizenship seek to bomb an American landmark

and flee the country within a year of being naturalized? How, why or where Shahzad became radicalized remains unclear, but he was born into a generation in the years after the military autocrat, Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq, began to inject a rigid version of Islam into Pakistan's education system.

#### **Why Pakistan?**

It was initially doubted that the car bomb incident in Times Square was part of a complicated international terrorist plot; however, the focus of the investigation is now concentrating on Pakistan. Why do Pakistan and the Pakistani diaspora churn out such a large proportion of the world's terrorists? It is this source that produced 1993 CIA shooter Mir Aimal Kansi; 1993 World Trade Center bomber Ramzi Yousef; 9/11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed; *The Wall Street Journal* reporter Daniel Pearl's kidnapper, Omar Saeed Sheikh; the three men behind the July 2005 train and bus bombings in London; several participants in the 2004 train bombings in Madrid; the 2006 London plan to blow up several jetliners with liquid explosives and the 2008 attack in Mumbai, India — to mention only a few of the better-known terror events over the past several years. And the list of jihadists not actually from Pakistan — but whose passage to jihadism traveled through that country — is even longer. Among them are Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri, Mohamed Atta, shoe bomber Richard Reid and the American John Walker Lindh.

In order to understand Pakistan's emergence as a jihadist haven, it is important to go back to its creation. Carved out of the Muslim majority areas of British India in 1947, Pakistan was the world's first modern nation based solely on Islam. The country's name means "Land of the Pure," and its capital city is appropriately called Islamabad. From the start, Pakistan was touched by the messianic zeal of pan-Islamism. Islamic fanatics flocked to Pakistan, making Pakistan a second home to all sorts of collaborators with leading Islamist ideologues. In 1949, Pakistan established the world's first transnational Islamic organization — the World Muslim Congress — and predictably the virulently anti-Semitic Grand Mufti of Jerusalem was appointed president.

Through alternating periods of civilian and military rule, one element in Pakistan has remained constant — the central place of Islam in national life. In the 1960s, Pakistan launched a war against India in order to seize

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control of Kashmir, India's only Muslim-majority province. Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto boasted about Pakistanis eating grass if necessary to create an "Islamic bomb." The father of Pakistan's nuclear program, A.Q. Khan, would later export nuclear technology to the revolutionary regime in Iran. In the 1990s, armed with the confidence and experience learned in the Afghan resistance against the Soviets, Pakistan's main spy agency — Inter-Services Intelligence, or ISI — assisted the Taliban in prevailing in Afghanistan and directed their efforts against India.

The western border area of Pakistan, a largely autonomous zone known as the Federally Administered Tribal Areas — or FATA — has long served as the reconstituted base of al Qaeda and as home to scores of militant Islamic groups who aim to attack Afghan, Indian or Pakistani targets. This area has gained prominence in recent years as a location where individuals — including Americans like Shahzad — can receive training in the use of weapons and explosives for attacks within the United States. Najibullah Zazi, an Afghan-American who pled guilty last fall to plotting to blow up New York City subway stations, trained in Waziristan in the summer of 2008. David Headley, the Pakistani-American involved with the 2008 Mumbai attacks, also spent time in Waziristan. Bryant Neal Vinas, an American who received training in the region in 2008, later confessed to plotting an attack against United States railways, while five young Americans from northern Virginia traveled to Pakistan last year to be trained by militant groups in the region.

FATA is clearly the center of al Qaeda today, a cross fertilization of people and ideas consisting of al Qaeda, other Islamic militant organizations, and additional local, allied groups in the border region. It is therefore not surprising that Pakistani law enforcement officials arrested at least a dozen people in Pakistan in connection with the planned Times Square attack. There is also little doubt among intelligence officials that the barrage of attacks by CIA drones over the past year has made Pakistan's Taliban — which goes by the name Tehrik-i-Taliban — increasingly determined to seek revenge by finding any way possible to attack the United States. And the network of alliances within FATA appears to be strengthening, not weakening. Baitullah Mehsud, the deceased Taliban leader, boasted in March 2010 that his group was planning an attack on the United States. The

Pakistani Taliban, believed to be involved in the Times Square bombing, is only the latest group to expand beyond a local agenda and strike the United States.

*Fortunately — due to both vigilance and luck — New York avoided a catastrophe, and the terrorist was quickly identified and captured. However, officials in Washington, D.C., and New York need to take a hard look at what, if anything, might have been done to prevent this earlier. Both authorities and individuals need to be more alert than ever before for lone wolves and homegrown extremists, and like the vendor in Times Square on May 1, should not hesitate to report anything amiss. But while standard police vigilance and public alertness certainly plays a role, the real key to minimizing risk is to keep these disaffected and unbalanced lone wolves from making connections with larger networks. It was very likely that the Pakistan Taliban — a terrorist group once thought unable to attack the United States — had a significant role in the attempted Times Square bombing, elevating concerns that other foreign militant groups are also planning to attack the United States. The lesson for the United States and its allies is that there is a need to be much more proactive in detecting and disrupting international terrorists. The onslaught of lone wolves, homegrown terrorists and other force multipliers will continue — they are going to keep coming and coming. The universe of potential jihadists is so wide that the sheer number of suspects simply overwhelms the government's ability to process them all. Consequently, law enforcement has to focus on preventing sophisticated terrorist organizations from establishing a presence in the United States. Authorities should utilize the same effective techniques that successfully infiltrated and neutralized mob and drug trafficking organizations. Federal agents and the police must be empowered with the resources, techniques and legal authorities to use informants and undercover agents and to install wiretaps on phones and computers in a timely manner; in order to identify, infiltrate and crush any terrorist organization before it can mount a sophisticated operation — or train a future Times Square bomber. **The time for urgency is now.**®*



The Lipman Report Editors