

The Times Square Bombing Attempt

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Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Terrorism](#)

In-depth Report: [PAKISTAN](#)

Faisal Shahzad, a 30-year-old US citizen of Pakistani descent, was arrested at Kennedy International Airport late Monday night in connection with the failed attempt to set off a car bomb in New York City's Time Square. He was taken off a passenger jet bound for Dubai and then onto Pakistan. US authorities claim that he has admitted responsibility for the failed bombing.

US Attorney Eric Holder announced that Shahzad would be charged with an act of terrorism and an attempt to use a "weapon of mass destruction."

While there have been reports of arrests in Pakistan—including in at least some cases of Shahzad's relatives—and there has been media speculation that he could be tied to the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, or so-called Pakistani Taliban, the suspect has insisted that he acted alone, according to police sources.

In fact, by all accounts the bomb (which included a kind of fertilizer that is nonexplosive), as well as the method used to deliver it, bore the hallmarks of extreme amateurism, strongly suggesting that the individual responsible was not someone who had received professional training.

As with all such cases, questions remain about the real motive and authorship of the attempted terrorist act. Information about the suspect and his connections has only begun to surface.

A father of two who became a naturalized citizen one year ago after marrying a US citizen, Shahzad earned a bachelor's degree in computer science and engineering and completed his MBA, but was apparently without a job or money and had lost his family's home through foreclosure. One can only speculate as to whether these difficult personal conditions, which confront millions of Americans, played a role in pushing Shahzad toward a desperate act.

Press reports have also indicated that, while he had given his birthplace as Karachi, he was actually born in Kashmir, the territory disputed between India and Pakistan, where thousands have died in sectarian violence over the last decades.

It is fortunate that the attempted terrorist bombing failed. Had the gasoline cans and propane tanks loaded into the SUV left in Times Square ignited, it would have unleashed a fireball that could have killed or maimed hundreds of people.

The victims of this device would have been innocent civilians who bear no responsibility for the criminal actions being carried out by the US government in the Middle East and Central Asia, as well as in Pakistan itself.

Those who would have been burned and suffocated in such an attack would have included people from every corner of the globe, tourists and immigrants alike, undoubtedly including a significant number from south Asia. Given the state of US, not to mention world, public opinion, it is virtually certain that the majority of the victims would have been opponents of the ongoing US wars.

Such an attack would have a wholly reactionary character, inflicting death and destruction upon individuals who have no control over the actions of the US government and its military.

Its main consequence would be to provide Washington with a fresh justification for escalating its wars abroad, while stepping up police-state measures at home. By spreading fear and confusion, amplified by the corporate-controlled media, it would serve as a means of politically disorienting broad sections of the population.

New York City's billionaire Mayor Michael Bloomberg Tuesday continued with a refrain that he sounded even before there was a firm suspect in the car bomb attempt, blaming the terrorist action on Islamists, calling them "those who hate the freedoms that make this city and this country so great."

This is, in the most literal sense of the word, nonsense. Behind such terrorist actions is hatred not for "freedoms," but rather boiling rage over concrete actions carried out by a US government that has deprived millions of people in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and elsewhere of not only their own freedom, but their lives.

Citizens from Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Egypt, all of whom have been implicated in one or another terrorist act or attempted act since September 11, 2001, have been systematically denied basic freedoms by police-state dictatorships backed by Washington.

They have watched as the US military, acting in the name of a "war on terrorism" and "liberating" the people of Afghanistan and Iraq, have killed over one million people and turned millions more into homeless refugees. In Pakistan, millions have grown to hate Washington for the unceasing murder of civilians by pilotless Predator drones.

And Muslims all over the world have seen successive administrations, Republican and Democratic alike, lend unconditional support to the Israeli regime as it deprives Palestinians in the occupied territories of the most basic human liberties, including the right to life itself.

None of this justifies terrorism, which does nothing to change these conditions and only strengthens the hands of US imperialism. However, it is these acts of aggression and repression—not some inexplicable hatred for "freedoms"—that have produced a seething anger that can give rise to retrograde acts of individual terror.

The answer to such terrorist threats can be found only in the struggle to put an end to US wars of aggression abroad and to unite workers and youth in the struggle for a better, socialist future based on the principles of internationalism, social equality and genuine democratic control over economic and social life.

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