



Written by [Mary McHugh](#) on May 3, 2010

## Failed Car Bomb in Times Square

A video surveillance camera recorded a dark green Nissan Pathfinder driving west on 45th Street, at 6:28 p.m. Saturday night in New York City's famous Times Square. Moments later the vehicle was parked awkwardly into the curb at Broadway. When a T-shirt vendor, Lance Horten, noticed it smoking, the Vietnam vet notified a nearby mounted police officer, Wayne Rhatigan.



Officer Rhatigan circled the vehicle and, smelling gunpowder, in turn alerted two other officers patrolling close by. These were two female rookies who, along with Rhatigan, took immediate action in clearing pedestrians in the area. This clearance included theatres, restaurants, and hotels, including the South Tower of the New York Marriott Marquis Hotel, being emptied of their customers and patrons in an attempt to avoid a possible catastrophe. A major area of midtown Manhattan was affected — from 43rd Street to 48th Street, and from Sixth to Eighth Avenues — once the suspicious Pathfinder was discovered. Times Square is about four miles north of the World Trade Center, which was bombed in 1993, then attacked again on September 11, 2001.

According to the New York [Daily News](#), another Vietnam Vet, handbag vendor Duane Jackson, also noticed the Nissan Pathfinder, and was immediately suspicious. The paper recounted his experience as follows:

“Why is this knucklehead parked in the bus lane?” Jackson, 58, of Buchanan, NY, said he asked himself after spotting the Nissan Pathfinder in a No Standing zone just as cops alerted by Horton were responding.

A cop shined a flashlight through the tinted windows.

“It was strange,” said Jackson, “I saw the keys, 10 or 15, in the ignition.”

What Jackson saw next really scared him. “Smoke started coming out of it then the pops began — five or six of them,” Jackson said Sunday. “They sounded like firecrackers,” he said. “That’s when everyone started running.”

Firefighters who had arrived shortly after the first call, also heard a popping sound from the Pathfinder.



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Fire Commissioner Sal Cassano described the sound as not quite an explosion. Officials agreed that it appeared to be in the process of detonating, but malfunctioned. "I think the intent was to cause a significant ball of fire," NYC Police Commissioner Raymond W. Kelly said early on. A coke can full of gun powder was discovered inside the SUV, along with three propane tanks, two full five-gallon containers of gas, fireworks, two clocks with batteries, some wiring, and other components. On Fox News, Sen. Chuck Schumer called the attempt "amateurish."

Smoke was coming from the back of the dark-colored Pathfinder, its hazard lights were on and "it was just sitting there," said Rallis Gialaboukis, 37, another vendor who has hawked his wares for 20 years across the street. A white robotic police arm broke windows of the SUV to remove any explosive materials. The SUV had a scratched-out VIN number and contained a number of fingerprints and a metal box described as a "gun locker." The SUV was later towed off under wraps to a forensic lab location in Queens. At a Sunday afternoon news conference, Commissioner Kelly said there were eight bags in the locker that held a substance that looked and felt like fertilizer. This is undergoing examination.

Connecticut license plates stolen from a Ford pickup were found on the bomb-filled SUV. According to law-enforcement officials, the pickup had been taken to a junkyard near Bridgeport, Connecticut, within the last two weeks and the plates taken from there. The FBI interviewed the previous owner of the Ford on Saturday night, and he did not appear to be regarded as a suspect. The junkyard remains a primary target of the initial investigation.

At a 2:00 a.m. press conference after rushing back from Washington D.C., Mayor Michael Bloomberg said, "We avoided what could have been a very deadly event," adding, "It certainly could have exploded and had a pretty big fire and a decent amount of explosive impact."

Because the vehicle had tinted windows, video would be unlikely to show clearly whoever was inside, but as of 1:00 p.m. on Sunday, a law-enforcement official told CBS news that they had video of a person exiting the vehicle on foot and that the suspect was seen by two police officers. It was theorized that the suspect was interrupted in the act of detonation and, panicked by the appearance of police, disappeared into the crowd. The Commissioner, however, denied that such a video existed. He stated they have a few videos of interest, gleaned from what was immediately available from sources around the scene. Kelly hoped to have others to examine once more businesses opened on Monday.

Meanwhile, police had heard from a man in Pennsylvania who happened to have been present in Times Square at about the same time the SUV was discovered, and who had filmed some of the mounted police. Part of this video showed a white man in his 40s looking furtively around as he came through the alley near the vehicle. He removed his dark outer shirt, revealing a red shirt underneath. Officials were on their way to view it.

At this time the investigation is headed by the NYC Police Department, with assistance from the FBI, CIA, and Dept. of Homeland Security. As of now, it is not clear that the bombing attempt was aided or abetted by al-Qaeda or any other specific terrorist group. In a FOX interview, Sen. Schumer stated there had been no "chatter" attached to this event — meaning there was no previous warning or evidence to let officials know what was planned.

The London [Telegraph](#) speculated that the attempted attack may be the attempted fulfillment of a threat from Islamics against the creators of the *South Park* cartoon series, as the loaded SUV was parked quite close to the building housing Viacom, owners of *South Park*. According to the paper:



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Last month postings on an Islamic website warned the creators of South Park — Matt Stone and Trey Parker — that they could face violent reprisals after an episode of the show featured Mohammed in a bear suit.

A posting on the website of a US-based group called Revolution Muslim warned Stone and Parker that they would “probably wind up like Theo Van Gogh”, the Dutch film-maker who was murdered in 2004 by a Muslim angered by his film about Muslim women.

Officials said the device found Saturday night was crudely constructed, but Islamic militants have used propane and compressed gas for years to enhance the force of explosives. Those instances include the 1983 suicide attack on the U.S. Marines barracks at the Beirut airport that killed 241 U.S. service members, and the 2007 attack on the international airport in Glasgow, Scotland.

The BBC’s security correspondent, Gordon Corera, said that a Pakistani-based militant group has issued a message claiming blame. Feeling that this claim may be merely an opportunistic grab for attention, U.S. officials will want to wait for more evidence before acting in accordance with this claim.



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