



Written by on May 17, 2010

Times Square Bomber: Additional Arrests, Lingering Questions

On Thursday, May 13, the FBI and other investigators performed simultaneous raids in four different states in connection with the attempted Times Square car bombing of Saturday, May 1. In Pakistan, officials arrested a man linked to the Pakistan Taliban who claims to have helped the bombing suspect, Faisal Shahzad, in arranging contacts in Pakistan for terrorist training.

According to Reuters, apart from what Shahzad or the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) organization have thus far claimed as facts related to themselves, this man is the source for an "independent stream" of evidence linking this Taliban group to the events in New York City. Shahzad asserts to have acted alone, although admitting he received training in Pakistan. Soon after the attempt, the TTP claimed association with it, then repeatedly changed its position, first denying involvement and saying it did not even know Shahzad (but praised his efforts), and then reasserting its original claim of association. If confirmed, this is its first such terrorist attempt on U.S. soil.



Regarding the events of May 13, [Reuters said](#):

The Boston-area searches occurred at a house in Watertown, where two people were known to have been taken into custody, and at a gasoline station in affluent Brookline.

U.S. federal agents could be seen carrying boxes, envelopes and a crowbar out of the multifamily building in Watertown, a working-class town with a large Middle Eastern community.

Massachusetts authorities said the people had been under surveillance for some time but did not specify how long.

"These are people who are connected to Mr. Shahzad. We're still trying to determine exactly what the nature of that connection was," [Atty. Gen.] Holder told reporters in Washington.

"There's at least a basis to believe that one of the things that they did was provide him with funds," he said, calling the arrests a significant step.

He said investigators were looking into whether those arrested knew what the money would be used for.



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A law enforcement source said the two people arrested near Boston were Pakistani. The third arrest occurred in South Portland, Maine, according to local media.

In 2001, two men suspected in the September 11 attacks, including accused mastermind Mohammed Atta, left Portland to fly to Boston, where they hijacked one of the airliners that was crashed into New York's World Trade Center.

The [Associated Press](#) had a similar account:

On Thursday, authorities following the money trail in the failed attack conducted raids in several places in the Northeast and arrested three men. The two men arrested in the Boston area were Pir Khan, 43, and Aftab Khan, a man in his 20s, law enforcement officials said. A third man, Mohamad Rahman, was arrested in Maine, according to one of the officials. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss an ongoing investigation.

Authorities said the three supplied funds to Shahzad but may not have known how the money would be used. They were arrested on immigration violations, not criminal charges. All three are in the custody of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, said agency spokeswoman Kelly Nantel.

... Meanwhile, a federal law enforcement official told the AP on Friday that Shahzad has told investigators he received money at a meeting in a Dunkin' Donuts off a Long Island Rail Road stop before the May 1 bombing attempt. Authorities retrieved surveillance video from the shop in Ronkonkoma, N.Y., based on Shahzad's information, the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity because the investigation is ongoing.

The official declined to say who Shahzad met with, how much money was exchanged or whether the video proved useful. The timing of the meeting wasn't specified, although the doughnut shop has been closed for renovations since April 20.

Dunkin' Brands Inc. spokeswoman Michelle King said Friday the franchisee has turned over 30 days worth of video to the FBI.

Rahman, the man detained in Maine, is a computer programmer who has worked since August for Artist and Craftsman Supply, which has 15 stores from Portland to Los Angeles. Rahman was creating computer programs to automate the receipt of inventory from vendors.

Larry Adlerstein, the Portland-based company's owner, said he asked Rahman a few days ago about what it felt like to be from Pakistan following the Times Square attempted bombing arrest.

"He said, 'I know the fellow who they claim is responsible for the attempted bomb in Times Square. I haven't seen him for eight or nine years. He was a simple, uncomplicated person with no strong ideas. Maybe that's what these terrorist organizations want, someone who's a blank slate,'" Adlerstein recalled.

Regarding the New York and New Jersey raids, another [Associated Press](#) report said:

Homes were searched in Centereach and Shirley, N.Y., both on Long Island, a law enforcement official told The Associated Press Thursday. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because the investigation is ongoing.

Ashim Chakraborty, who owns the home in Centereach, said FBI agents and police officers came to his home Thursday morning seeking to question a couple — a Pakistani man and an American



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woman — who have lived in the basement apartment for the past 18 months.

The woman, who did not identify herself, was still in the basement Thursday afternoon, telling reporters only, "Drop dead, I'm an American."

In New Jersey, the FBI searched a home in Cherry Hill, N.J., and a print shop in Camden, N.J., said FBI spokesman J.J. Klaver in Philadelphia.

Two brothers, Muhammad Fiaez and Iqbal Hinhara, live at the Cherry Hill condominium, Fiaez said. He said his brother owns the print shop.

Authorities arrived at their home at 6 a.m., Fiaez said, questioned him and his brother on how long they have lived in the U.S. and on the business. After questioning, the FBI told Fiaez he wasn't of interest to them.

Meanwhile more facts are surfacing about Faisal Shahzad as people who know him are interviewed, and more material is investigated. The *New York Times* has reported that Mr. Shahzad sent an email early in 2006 to some of his friends. The email indicated that he was bothered by what some of his fellow Muslims were going through, including the events in Iraq and Afghanistan, and that he was concerned with what was happening to Palestinians in addition to anger over cartoons, especially in a Denmark publication, lampooning the Prophet Muhammad.

Following what can be found on other militant Internet sites — that Islam must fight the West as the West humiliates the Moslem world with wars, cartoons ... and Islam therefore is punished because it does not fight back — Mr. Shahzad asserted, "The crusade has already started against Islam and Muslims with cartoons of our beloved Prophet." He went on to quote verses from the Koran as proof of what "Allah commands about fighting for Islam." This may explain his more militant change, though some feel that began during his U.S. college career when Shahzad interacted with other Moslems on campus.

According to the *Times*:

... He understood the notion that Islam forbids the killing of innocents, he wrote. But to those who insist only on "peaceful protest," he posed a question: "Can you tell me a way to save the oppressed? And a way to fight back when rockets are fired at us and Muslim blood flows?"

"Everyone knows how the Muslim country bows down to pressure from west. Everyone knows the kind of humiliation we are faced with around the globe."

At this time Mr. Shahzad was 26 and seemed to nevertheless be doing well in this country with which he seemed so angry. He was a financial analyst making \$50,000 a year, had just received his green card giving him legal U.S. residency and owned a new house in Connecticut – married now to an American-Pakistani woman from Colorado. The year 2006 was also when friends say Shahzad became more religious and turned away more from the Pakistan he had known when younger. He had less to do with the privileged world of his father, a retired vice marshal in the Pakistani Air Force. He also indicated that he was thinking of leaving America. Continues the [Times](#):

In April 2009, the same month Mr. Shahzad got his United States citizenship, he sent an e-mail message to friends that foreshadowed his militant destiny. He criticized the views of a moderate Pakistani politician, writing, "I bet when it comes to defending the lands, his opinion would be we should do dialogue." The politician had "bought into the Western jargon" of calling the mujahedeen, or foreign fighters, "extremist," wrote Mr. Shahzad, who urged the recipients of the



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message to find “a proper Sheikh to understand the Quran.”

One of the recipients responded by asking Mr. Shahzad which sheikhs he followed.

Writing in Urdu, Mr. Shahzad replied, “My sheikhs are in the field.” A few months later, he abruptly quit his job and left for Pakistan, where, officials say, he was later trained in bomb-making by the Pakistani Taliban.

If anything struck Mr. Shahzad’s friends and family as different, it was his new religiosity. He no longer drank, and was praying five times a day, stopping into mosques in Stamford, Norwalk and Bridgeport. Some of his friends thought nothing of it; plenty of Pakistani immigrants went through more spiritual phases. What set Mr. Shahzad apart, they said, was not his Islamic devotion, but the particular religious frame through which he had begun to interpret world events.

Return to Pakistan

Over the next few months, Mr. Shahzad and his wife held yard sales. The marriage appeared to be strained; Mr. Shahzad was pressuring his wife to wear a hijab.... He also insisted that the family return to Pakistan while he searched for a job in the Middle East; his wife wanted him to find the job first....

On June 2, Mr. Shahzad called his wife from Kennedy Airport. He said that he was leaving for Pakistan, and that it was her choice whether she wanted to follow him.... Ms. Mian refused. Later that month, she packed up her children and moved to Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, where her parents were living.

Mr. Shahzad stayed with his parents in Peshawar. He appears to have stopped paying his mortgage; the bank foreclosed on his Connecticut home in September. One month later, at a family gathering in Peshawar, Mr. Shahzad seemed angered by the American-led drone strikes along the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan, a close friend said. He was “condemning the attacks and the government for not doing anything about it,” the friend said.

[ABC News](#) had reported that the Times Square bombing suspect, Faisal Shahzad, was “extremely nervous” when U.S. agents bordered the plane to arrest him the night of Monday, May 15 but “hasn’t stopped talking” since according to law enforcement authorities. Said ABC:

According to a person briefed on the FBI interrogation, Shahzad has told federal agents that he was angry at the CIA missile strikes carried out in Pakistan and suffered a personal crisis in his life. He has reportedly said he carried out the attempted bombing because he was under duress and that he feared for his family’s safety if he didn’t fulfill the mission.

Perhaps the “personal crisis” Shahzad supposedly spoke about was the separation he currently had with his wife, and the “duress” was some Taliban threat to his family if he did not follow through with the Times Square bombing attempt. This remains to become clearer.

As for why he appears to be so willing to communicate with American authorities, the [Empty Wheel site](#) conjectures:

Now consider what happened in two other big counterterrorism cases this year. To get Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab to cooperate, the FBI flew to Nigeria and persuaded his family to get him to cooperate (note, given Abdulmutallab’s father’s role in banking, the US would have a way of pressuring the father). And once the government indicted Najibullah Zazi’s father (followed by a few of his friends) it took just weeks to get him to plead guilty and start cooperating with investigators.



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And all that, of course, happens against the background of incidences where the families of other detainees, notably Pakistanis Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and Aafia Siddiqui, were taken into custody and (at least in the case of KSM) used as threats against the parent.

Our government has been very successful at coercing terrorist suspects by using the suspects' family.

But another question which has arisen from many quarters and which has yet to be satisfactorily answered, is how the Terror Task Force that had already been watching Faisal Shahzad as of 2004, still apparently "lost track" of him until he surfaced in Times Square. The [Washington Examiner](#) looked into this curious occurrence, saying:

Deep inside a *New York Times* profile of the accused Times Square bomber — "From Suburban Father to a Terrorism Suspect" - there is this:

George LaMonica, a 35-year-old computer consultant, said he bought his two-bedroom condominium in Norwalk, Conn., from Mr. Shahzad for \$261,000 in May 2004. A few weeks after he moved in, Mr. LaMonica said, investigators from the national Joint Terrorism Task Force interviewed him, asking for details of the transaction and for information about Mr. Shahzad. It struck Mr. LaMonica as unusual, but he said detectives told him they were simply "checking everything out."

In recent terrorism cases, the Ft. Hood shooting and the attempted Christmas Day bombing, we learned that authorities knew about the perpetrators before the attacks took place. It seems reasonable to guess that, given Faisal Shahzad's background, travel patterns, communications habits and associations, the authorities knew something about him, too. The next few days might tell us a lot.

P.S. — Some news organizations are reporting that U.S. authorities knew nothing — absolutely nothing — about Shahzad. The *Washington Post*, for example, reports that Shahzad "was allegedly able to train with terrorists in Pakistan, return to the United States to assemble a car bomb in Connecticut and park it in Times Square without anyone in the nation's vast counterterrorism apparatus knowing anything about it." We'll see if that turns out to be the case.

The Joint Terrorism Task Force referred to as interviewing Mr. Lamonica, is the same FBI-led interagency group that netted Mr. Shahzad on board a plane on his way out of the country from JFK airport two days after the bombing attempt.

On Wednesday, May 5, the website [Mother Jones](#) continued the question along these lines:

So far, the media attention has focused largely on the lapses that lead to Shahzad's near-escape — the fact that he eluded the federal agents who'd been surveilling him and was able to buy a plane ticket and board his flight even after his name had been added to the no-fly list. But a bigger question may be how long the feds had Shahzad in their sights and how he came to be there to begin with. The matter was addressed briefly at Wednesday's White House press briefing, when ABC News correspondent Jake Tapper asked Robert Gibbs [WH press secretary] about the passage in the *Times* story:

TAPPER: And do you have any response to reports that this individual Shahzad, Faisal Shahzad - the Joint Terrorism Task Force did know about him, had been alerted about him years before? Is there any new information you have about it?



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GIBBS: Not that I'm aware of. No, not that I'm aware of. I have not seen that report. Let me take a look at it and see where the best place is —

The reporter for *Mother Jones*, Daniel Schulman, had a [follow-up](#) on this dated May 11 which noted, in part:

According to CBS, from 1999 to 2008 Shahzad's name appeared on a government immigration watch list known as the Traveler Enforcement Compliance System after he brought "approximately \$80,000 cash or cash instruments" into the US. It's unclear if this is related to the inquiry LaMonica describes, which remains a major mystery—all the more so because the FBI maintains it has no record of interviewing LaMonica. Further, spokesman Paul Bresson denied that any investigation involving Shahzad took place in that timeframe.

Since Shahzad's arrest, LaMonica, a 35-year-old computer consultant, has been besieged by reporters digging for information on the suspected terrorist's background. Not that LaMonica has much to add. "I'll tell you the same thing I've told the hundreds of other reporters," he responded when I contacted him via Facebook. "I met him at the closing just long enough to get writer's cramp while signing the mountain of legal documents," LaMonica wrote. "He was just a normal young guy. He dressed in a polo or button-down, and there was really nothing 'off' about him."

"The only item of interest," he went on, was the fact that an FBI task-force investigator contacted him. "He basically asked all the questions you guys have been," LaMonica said. "It really didn't seem like it was anything other than a routine investigation."

Based on LaMonica's description, the detective he says he spoke with was likely a Connecticut state trooper detailed to a Joint Terrorism Task Force:

"... As far as I'm concerned, this is not the person I knew six years ago," Kevin Courbois, Shahzad's real estate agent on the condo sale to LaMonica, told me. He said that authorities never made any attempt to contact him about Shahzad, and he's puzzled why anyone would question LaMonica. Mostly, though, he's baffled by Shahzad's apparent transformation from a mild-mannered and hard-working young man into a suspected terrorist with alleged ties to the Pakistani Taliban. The Faisal Shahzad he remembers was "a very genuine, nice person" who once offered to host Courbois, an avid traveler, if he ever made it to Pakistan. "You come and you stay with my family," Shahzad told his realtor. "We'll treat you right."

After the FBI's Bresson told me the bureau had no record of speaking with LaMonica, I contacted the Connecticut State Police, where a spokesman told me that his office would have no knowledge of people interviewed by the JTTF, since task force personnel are under the bureau's authority. Eventually I was put in touch with FBI agent William Reiner, a spokesman for the FBI's New Haven field office, where Connecticut's JTTF is based. When I described LaMonica's account, he responded, "That's news to me. If it happened in 2004, we were running out some kind of lead. But I think there could be a slight mix up here." He promised to look into it.

A few hours passed, and I phoned him back for an update. But Reiner's response shed no light on the mystery. He had only this to say: "We're not going to comment on any investigative info whatsoever."

On May 13 Secretary of State Hilary Clinton was reported as continuing her insistence that Pakistan must continue to do even more to fight the terrorists and extremists on its own soil. Speaking from the U.S. Institute of Peace she reiterated, "We think that there is more that has to be done and we do fear



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the consequences of a successful attack that can be traced back to Pakistan because we value a more comprehensive relationship."

Meanwhile the Al Jazeera news agency had a report of its own, citing a tape provided by the [Taliban Pakistan](#). It conveyed a statement from Taliban spokesman Azam Tariq as saying: "God willing, one of those days, a car like this will explode in America.

"And America will not be the only target but also all the countries which are allied with it. America and all its allies will burn."

Knowing this is no idle dream nor idle threat, questions are arising as to why our various U.S. defense and protection agencies, once having their eye on possible terror suspects, again have had a problem preventing them from following through on a terrorist act? Americans are loath to think there is more going on here than sporadic human error.

Photo: President Barack Obama meets New York City police officers in their Real Time Crime Center in New York on May 13, 2010. (Faisal Shahzad pictured at top left): AP Images



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