

ISSUE BRIEF

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54th Terror Plot Against the U.S.: Qazi Brothers' Plot to Attack New York

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In late November, brothers Raees Alam Qazi and Sheheryar Alam Qazi were arrested and charged with conspiring to detonate a weapon of mass destruction and to provide material support to terrorists. Until recently, details on the alleged plot were sparse. In a detention hearing on December 18, however, it was revealed that the men sought to avenge the deaths of those killed in drone strikes in Afghanistan by blowing up a New York City landmark.

This most recent plot signifies the 54th thwarted terrorist plot against the United States since 9/11 and serves as a reminder of the need to remain vigilant against the continued threat of violent extremism within the United States.

The Qazi Brothers' Plot.

According to details released in the detention hearing of Raees Alam

Qazi—a 20-year-old naturalized U.S. citizen born in Pakistan—he traveled to New York City on November 24, 2012. Once there, he intended to get a job to fund his terrorist plans. Considering potential targets including Times Square, Wall Street, and Broadway theaters, Raees sought to avenge the deaths of those killed by drone strikes in Afghanistan by carrying out either a suicide attack or a bombing by a remote control device.

Not finding work, Raees returned to Florida on November 29 to further prepare for the attack. He and his older brother, Sheheryar Alam Qazi, were arrested the next day. While it appears that Raees was intended to be the main perpetrator of the attack, Sheheryar is said to have supported his brother financially and logistically in planning the attack.

Raees allegedly told law enforcement officers that he had attempted to contact al-Qaeda and was inspired by the lectures of the now deceased al-Qaeda cleric Anwar al-Awlaki and his group's English language magazine, *Inspire*. A search of the younger Qazi brother's home turned up materials including Christmas tree lights, wires, batteries, hydrogen peroxide, and a disassembled remote-control car, as well as what appears to be a goodbye letter to his brother.

Both men have been charged with conspiring to detonate a weapon of mass destruction and to provide material support to terrorists, and have pled not guilty. They remain in detention awaiting further trial.

Continued Threat of Violent Extremism. With the foiling of this most recent plot, at least 54 terrorist plots against the U.S. have been foiled since 9/11. Of these, the most frequent objectives have been domestic military targets and New York City. Indeed, during just the last few months of 2012 alone, New York City faced two potential attacks against the city's major hubs.

These thwarted attacks serve not only as a reminder of the continued threat of terrorism, but also of the need to ensure that our nation's law enforcement and intelligence authorities continue to possess the tools they need to halt attacks long before the public is in danger. At the same time, this most recent plot adds to the large number of terrorist attacks that could be considered to be homegrown within the U.S.—speaking to the importance of strengthening efforts to counter violent extremism in the U.S.

Ultimately, in order to better protect the U.S. and halt terrorists in their tracks, Congress and the Obama Administration should:

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- **Fully implement a strategy to counter violent extremism.** Countering violent extremism is an important complementary effort to an effective counterterrorism strategy. In August 2011, the U.S. government released a plan called “Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States.”¹ The strategy focuses on outlining how federal agencies can assist and empower local officials, groups, and private organizations to prevent violent extremism. It includes strengthening law enforcement cooperation and helping communities understand how to protect themselves against and counter extremist propaganda (particularly online). Sadly, this plan is not a true strategy. It fails to assign responsibilities and does not direct action or resource investments. More should be done to transform a laundry list of good ideas into an effective program to support communities in protecting and strengthening civil society.
- **Maintain essential counterterrorism tools.** Support for important investigative tools such

as the PATRIOT Act is essential to maintaining the security of the U.S. and combating terrorist threats. Key provisions within the bill, such as the roving surveillance authority and business records provision, have proven essential in thwarting terror plots, yet require reauthorization every year. In order to ensure that law enforcement and intelligence authorities have the essential counterterrorism tools they need, Congress should seek permanent authorization of the three sunset provisions within the PATRIOT Act.

- **Clarify the domestic counterterrorism framework.** Cooperative efforts among local law enforcement, the ATF, and the FBI were essential in thwarting this plot before the American public was ever in danger. To aid future efforts, the U.S. should properly apportion roles and responsibilities among federal, state, and local government based on their resources (e.g., money, people, and experience). In order to clarify the domestic counterterrorism framework, the

President should issue an executive order establishing a national domestic counterterrorism and intelligence framework that clearly articulates how intelligence operations at all levels should function to combat terrorism while keeping citizens safe and free.

Terrorist Threat Remains.

Regrettably, this most recent plot is not likely to be the last attempted attack seen by New York City, or the U.S. as a whole. However, by continuing to provide our nation’s law enforcement and intelligence authorities with the essential counterterrorism tools they need, and by continuing to strengthen efforts to counter violent extremism, U.S. leaders can help ensure that the nation is better prepared to stop threats early on.

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1. Press release, “Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States,” The White House, August 3, 2011, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/08/03/empowering-local-partners-prevent-violent-extremism-united-states> (accessed January 2, 2013).