

Jihad on Main Street:

Explaining the Threat of Jihadist Terrorism to the American
Homeland Since 9/11

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Abstract

Since September 11, 2001, 26 jihadist plots and attacks have targeted the American homeland, but because the details of the plots and attacks as well as the profiles of their perpetrators vary greatly, scholars, government officials, and other authorities still disagree about the seriousness of threat posed by jihadist terrorism to the United States. This study provides a clearer understanding of the nature of jihadist terrorism in the US by examining all 26 plots and attacks in detail. It concludes that jihadist terrorism is generally a minimally-threatening, homegrown phenomenon, but some plots and attacks still emerge that *do* pose a serious threat to US national security. Of the 26 plots and attacks since 9/11, seven can be considered “serious,” and the emergence of these plots and attacks can best be explained by examining those using explosive devices separately from those using firearms. Regarding the first category, Western jihadists’ contacts with veteran jihadist organizations (such as al-Qaeda) and access to training camps explain the ability of some to construct serious bombing plots. As for the second category, the radicalization of individuals with criminal or military experience accounts for the preparation (and even execution) of serious shooting plots. As a result, the critical point at which a would-be bomber becomes a serious threat is his initial contact with a jihadist group, whereas the critical point for a would-be shooter is his radicalization. Understanding this distinction will allow security services to have a clearer and more nuanced picture of the jihadist threat to the US.

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Abbreviations

AQ	Al-Qaeda
AQAP	Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula
FATA	Federally Administered Tribal Areas
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FFI	Norwegian Defense Research Establishment
GICM	Moroccan Islamic Fighting Group
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
JI	Jemaah Islamiyah
JIS	Jamiyyat Ul-Islam Is-Saheeh
HMTD	Hexamethylene Triperoxide Diamine
HIS	Homeland Security Institute
KSM	Khalid Sheikh Mohammed
LAX	Los Angeles International Airport
LeT	Lashkar-e-Tayyiba
MI5	Military Intelligence, Section 5
MPS	Metropolitan Police Service
NYPD	New York Police Department
PETN	Pentaerythritol Tetranitrate
TATP	Triacetone Triperoxide

Chapter 1

The Jihadist Threat to the West

Since the World Trade Center attacks in 2001, jihadist terrorists have tried (in some cases, successfully) to attack the American homeland twenty-six times.¹ The plots have ranged from simple drive-by shootings to complex coordinated airplane bombings. In some cases, the United States barely dodged the bullet – an attempted airplane bombing in December 2009 could have caused more than 300 casualties if the explosive device had detonated. In other cases, the US was not so lucky – a shooting at Fort Hood in November 2009 caused more than forty casualties. In still other cases, the plot seemed more like a jihadist’s fantasy than a serious threat – a two-man cell in 2002 considered detonating thirty high-rise apartment buildings, simultaneously.

The diversity of these examples begs the question: How serious is the jihadist threat to the American homeland? Is it just chance that the US has not experienced another 9/11? Or, is the “threat” simply the over-exaggeration of the media machine? Or, does the threat level lie somewhere between these two extremes?

¹ In this study, I will use the terms “jihadism” and “jihadist” to refer to the acts of terrorism conducted by Islamic extremists and the perpetrators of these acts. Much controversy surrounds the use of these terms, since the word “jihad,” meaning “struggle,” has both militant and peaceful connotations. However, I use the terms “jihadism” and “jihadist,” rather than “terrorism” and “terrorist,” to emphasize that I am discussing a specific type of terrorism, that which is based around an extremist Islamic ideology.

To complicate the issue further, the jihadists themselves have varied drastically, from the highly-trained al-Qaeda operative to the untrained jihadist wannabe. Therefore, understanding the extent of training received and affiliations established by the jihadists targeting the US since 9/11 would be beneficial for understanding the jihadist threat. However, it does not suffice to know whether the jihadists are well-trained or -connected; it is also necessary to understand the impact these factors have on the seriousness of the threat. Are the jihadists who target the US primarily homegrown and therefore pose a minimal threat? Or, do they pose a serious threat *because* they are homegrown? Or, instead, are the majority of the jihadists affiliated with al-Qaeda and therefore an even more serious threat?

This study attempts to answer the myriad of questions posed, by first determining the “seriousness” of the jihadist plots against the US, then examining the training and affiliations of the plots’ perpetrators, and finally assessing the impact of these factors on the seriousness of their plots. Before embarking on an explanation of my own research, I outline the scholarly literature that has already attempted to answer some of the questions I have posed. Most of the studies examine only European cases, or they examine “the West” more generally. Few look specifically at the jihadist threat within the US. Furthermore, nearly all of the studies focus on either the extent to which the jihadist movement is trained and affiliated or the effect of training and affiliations on a jihadist’s operational effectiveness. However, only two scholars combine these tracks: Jeffrey M. Bale and Marc Sageman.²

Bale’s work, which is based on two European case studies, suggests that a jihadist cell’s proximity to a larger terrorist organization (such as al-Qaeda) influences its operational

² See, Jeffrey M. Bale, “Jihadist Cells and ‘I.E.D.’ Capabilities in Europe: Assessing the Present and Future Threat to the West,” Monterey Institute of International Studies, 2009; and, Marc Sageman, *Confronting al-Qaeda: Understanding the Threat in Afghanistan and Beyond*, presented before the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee, 7 October 2009, <http://www.fpri.org/transcripts/20091007.Sageman.ConfrontingalQaeda.pdf>.

effectiveness through the intervening mechanisms of knowledge, training, and resources.

Similarly, Sageman's work, which is based on a dataset of al-Qaeda-directed and -inspired plots and attacks in the West, concludes that terrorists with more training have a higher probability of success, but he argues that proximity to al-Qaeda has no impact on success. I will examine these two studies within the context of a variety of other studies that consider either the nature of jihadist networks in the West or the influence of terrorist knowledge and training.

The Nature of Jihadist Networks in the West

Since the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan, al-Qaeda's organizational structure has morphed from a centralized hierarchy of command to a decentralized network of cells. With the loss of its safe haven, al-Qaeda has espoused a flat organizational structure with relatively autonomous branches. Although al-Qaeda leadership currently appears to be regrouping in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region, it is clear that post-9/11 al-Qaeda does not resemble pre-9/11 al-Qaeda. The changing face of al-Qaeda has sparked a heated debate among terrorism scholars regarding the nature of the jihadist threat in Europe and the US: are jihadist terrorists organized in highly-trained al-Qaeda-directed cells or in untrained, unaffiliated homegrown groups?

Most scholars at least agree that the nature of the threat has changed over time. Sageman describes three "waves" of global Islamist terrorism since the 1980s.³ The first wave is comprised of the "old guard" who fought against the Soviets in Afghanistan in the 1980s. These mujahideen, who were primarily Egyptians of middle or upper socio-economic status, formed strong relationships in combat and became the key leaders of al-Qaeda. In the 1990s, young people, mostly from the middle class, joined the global Islamist terrorist social movement,

³ Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008, pp. 49-50.

forming the second wave. During this wave, Saudis and Muslim expatriates in Europe became the most important players. Many traveled to Afghanistan to train, and some volunteered to fight in Bosnia, Chechnya, and Kashmir, while others traveled to the West to carry out attacks. The second wave ended with the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan. The third wave, which began with the 2003 invasion of Iraq, is marked by second-generation Muslims in the West, generally from middle- to lower-class roots. Unlike the external threat to the West posed in the second wave, the threat posed by the third wave is an internal, “homegrown” one, composed of terrorists radicalized in the West with limited or no training abroad.⁴

While Sageman examines the trajectory of the *global* jihadist movement, other scholars have focused on the transformation of the *Western* jihadist movement, particularly in Europe. Petter Nesser categorizes jihadism in Europe into three distinct phases, which occur during the final two waves described by Sageman.⁵ During the first phase, which Nesser defines as 1994 to 1998, Algerian terrorists carried out attacks in France in order to deter its involvement in the local Algerian conflict between Islamists and the secular regime. Nesser describes Europe during this period as an “arena for local jihad.” Between 1998 and 2003-2004 (the second phase), Europe became an “arena for global jihad,” where al-Qaeda-affiliated and -trained terrorists planned attacks against US, Israeli, and French interests and citizens. These first two phases correspond to Sageman’s “second wave.” Between 2003-2004 and 2007, a period coinciding with Sageman’s “third wave,” Europe functioned as a “target for global jihad.” Al-Qaeda-inspired terrorists, who were largely recruited and radicalized within Europe, targeted European countries that contributed to the American “War on Terror.” By focusing on European jihadism,

⁴ Ibid., p. 71.

⁵ Petter Nesser, “Chronology of Jihadism in Western Europe 1994-2007: Planned, Prepared, and Executed Terrorist Attacks,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 31 (2008), p. 925.

Nesser's phases give a more detailed picture of the development of Sageman's homegrown third-wave jihadists.

While the studies by Sageman and Nesser analyze the jihadist movement holistically, Edwin Bakkar focuses specifically on characteristics of individual jihadists and networks of jihadists.⁶ Using a dataset of 28 networks comprised of 242 individuals, Bakkar studies the European jihadist threat between 2001 and 2006, a period that correlates roughly to Sageman's third wave and Nesser's third phase. Bakkar's data seems to support Sageman and Nesser's conclusion that the jihadist threat in Europe is primarily a homegrown one, or as Bakkar describes it, a threat posed by "self-organised" and "self-recognised" groups.⁷ Bakkar states that most of the European jihadist networks were established in their members' country of residence, and only a few had members who were radicalized or recruited outside of the country.⁸ Regarding the individual members, the vast majority were first-, second-, or third-generation migrants whose family origins were non-European, but a "significant part" of these individuals were born and raised in Europe.⁹ Most were residents of a European country, and of those for whom there was information on their place of recruitment, most were recruited in Europe.¹⁰ In fact, more than eighty percent of the individuals for whom Bakkar had recruitment information joined a jihadist network in their country of residence.¹¹ Bakkar concludes, "If we look at the circumstances in which these individuals became involved in jihadi terrorist activities, a picture emerges of networks including friends or relatives that do not seem to have formal ties with

⁶ Edwin Bakker, "Jihadi terrorists in Europe," Netherlands Institute of International Relations, December 2006, http://www.nbiz.nl/publications/2006/20061200_cscp_csp_bakker.pdf.

⁷ Ibid., p. 14.

⁸ Ibid., p. 33.

⁹ Ibid., p. 36.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 36, 41.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 48. Bakker compares this statistic to one presented by Sageman in his book *Understanding Terror Networks*. Based on a dataset of 172 global Salafi jihadists in operation in the 1990s and early 2000s, Sageman states that seventy percent joined the jihad in a foreign nation.

global Salafi networks; that radicalise with little outside interference; and that do so in the country in which they live, often together with family members or friends.”¹²

These authors agree that the jihadist threat in the West, while originally posed by foreigners entering Western countries, is now primarily a result of individuals radicalized within Western nations. However, the authors have differing opinions regarding the extent to which the threat is an internal one. On one end of the spectrum is Sageman, who argues that the current “third-wave” jihadist threat in the West is almost exclusively homegrown. He states that the threat “has evolved from a structured group of al Qaeda masterminds, controlling vast resources and issuing commands, to a multitude of informal local groups trying to emulate their predecessors by conceiving and executing operations from the bottom up.”¹³ The network of Islamic terrorists has thus become a “leaderless jihad.” Sageman claims that 78% of all “global neo-jihadi terrorist plots” in the West between 2003 and 2008 were perpetrated by autonomous homegrown groups, “without any connection, direction or control from al Qaeda Core or its allies.”¹⁴

Furthermore, Sageman argues that despite the regrouping of al-Qaeda Central in the Waziristan region of Pakistan since 2004, this consolidation has not extended beyond Waziristan and does not represent a global resurgence of al-Qaeda.¹⁵ According to Sageman, some third-wave terrorists have traveled to the Middle East in search of al-Qaeda Central to obtain approval for an attack, receive training, become involved in the fighting in Afghanistan or Iraq, or ask for funding. However, most fail in their search and either return to Europe empty-handed or are

¹² Ibid., p. 53.

¹³ Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad*, p. vii.

¹⁴ Sageman, *Confronting al-Qaeda*, p. 6.

¹⁵ Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad*, p. 128.

arrested by local law enforcement authorities.¹⁶ Because al-Qaeda's recruitment and training network has been severely weakened, third-wave terrorists are primarily self-selected and self-trained, resulting in a deterioration in the quality of tradecraft (i.e. techniques for operating clandestinely in a hostile environment without detection).¹⁷ Sageman concludes his argument by comparing the structure of the global jihadist movement to Adam Smith's "invisible hand": "No central coordination, whether part of al Qaeda Central or not, has been found or even suggested in the vast majority of [third-wave] terrorist operations... The little coherence that the al Qaeda social movement displays is mediated through a virtual market... The coordination is generated spontaneously from the bottom up, through the 'invisible hand' of the market."¹⁸

There have been many critical reviews of Sageman's work. Bruce Hoffman, Sageman's harshest critic, argues that although local informal terrorist groups are an important part of the global terrorist network, they do not constitute the entire threat. Hoffman critiques Sageman for focusing solely on the homegrown threat at the expense of acknowledging the continued importance of the "top down" dimension of terrorism in the West.¹⁹ According to Hoffman, the lingering influence of al-Qaeda has an important impact on Sageman's "bunches of guys."²⁰ For example, many "homegrown" terrorists in the UK were actually recruited and radicalized by terrorists who trained in al-Qaeda camps in the 1990s. Therefore, "the current threat is not only the product of radicalization but also the realization of strategic organizational decisions al

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 142.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 140.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 144-5.

¹⁹ Bruce Hoffman, "The Myth of Grass-Roots Terrorism: Why Osama bin Laden Still Matters," *Foreign Affairs* 87, no. 3 (June 2008): 133-8. <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/63408/bruce-hoffman/the-myth-of-grass-roots-terrorism>.

²⁰ In *Leaderless Jihad*, Sageman refers to the informal, homegrown jihadist groups as "bunches of guys," trying to convey the bottom-up process by which the global Islamist terrorist social movement forms through friend networks (p. 69).

Qaeda made at least a decade ago.”²¹ In addition, Hoffman argues that al-Qaeda’s resurgence in Afghanistan and Pakistan is highly concerning, and a dual strategy is needed that targets al-Qaeda leadership in the border regions and that also prevents internal recruitment of radicalized “bunches of guys.”²²

Like Hoffman, Lindsay Clutterbuck also criticizes Sageman for the narrowness of his conclusion that the threat has evolved from external infiltration to purely internal radicalization.²³ According to Clutterbuck, Sageman inaccurately portrays Europe as a single, homogenous geographic location and does not account for variation of the jihadist threat between nations.²⁴ For example, the jihadist threat in the UK is both external and internal; many British jihadists travel to Afghanistan or Pakistan with the intention of fighting jihad abroad but are encouraged by their trainers to return to the UK to carry out attacks. Thus, British jihadists are not exclusively homegrown and self-trained. Furthermore, Sageman ignores differences between individual jihadists, which may be based on ethnicity, culture, or local community.²⁵

Nesser also critiques Sageman’s theory of “leaderless jihad,” in particular Sageman’s argument that “there is no or little organizational push from above in the recruitment process.”²⁶ Using six case studies of European jihadist cells, Nesser contends that recruitment for terrorist cells in Europe is in fact more organized and systematic. Although he does not find evidence of a top-down recruitment apparatus, he has identified “recruiters” within his case studies.²⁷ These recruiters are sometimes affiliated with al-Qaeda or other veteran jihadist organizations, and

²¹ Hoffman, “The Myth of Grass-Roots Terrorism.”

²² Ibid.

²³ Lindsay Clutterbuck, “Rethinking Al Qaeda: Leaderless jihad: terror networks in the twenty-first century,” *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict* 1, no. 2 (2008): 196-200.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 198.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Petter Nesser, “Jihad in Europe; Recruitment for Terrorist Cells in Europe,” *Paths to Global Jihad: Radicalisation and Recruitment to Terror Networks*, Forsvarets Forskningsinstitut (FFI) Seminar, Oslo, 2006, p. 10.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 9.

sometimes they are simply members of a local European jihadist group.²⁸ Nesser also argues that al-Qaeda and other veteran groups influence recruitment by offering recruitment guidelines in books and on websites, providing propaganda to be used by recruiters, and facilitating training of operatives.²⁹ In conclusion, Nesser states, “Although there were no examples of classical top-down recruitment by an al-Qaida ‘recruitment apparatus’, there were almost without exceptions connections between terrorist cell members and more organized jihadist networks.”³⁰

The critiques by Hoffman, Clutterbuck, and Nesser tend to revolve around a consensus that Sageman has overextended his theory of “leaderless jihad,” claiming that jihadists in the West almost exclusively fit the profile of the homegrown, self-trained terrorist. In an attempt to provide a more accurate depiction of jihadist networks in the West, some scholars have developed categories of jihadist groups ranging from the al-Qaeda-directed cell to the autonomous, homegrown group.

Javier Jordán, Fernando M. Mañas, and Nicola Horsburgh propose a system for classifying European jihadist groups based on the proximity of each group to a global jihad organization. They outline three categories: “hit squads” (members of a global jihad organization who travel to Europe to carry out attacks), “local cells” (terrorists who are affiliated with a larger organization at the strategic and operational levels but are tactically autonomous), and “grassroots jihadist networks” (terrorists who accept the global jihadist ideology and the strategies of a larger organization but are not formally affiliated).³¹ According to Jordán et al., the majority of jihadist attacks in the West since 9/11 have been the work of grassroots jihadist networks, but they argue that these networks, unlike Sageman’s “bunches of guys,” “do not

²⁸ Ibid., p. 12.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 20.

³¹ Javier Jordán, Fernando M. Mañas, and Nicola Horsburgh, “Strengths and Weaknesses of Grassroots Jihadist Networks: The Madrid Bombings,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 31 (2008), pp. 18-19.

generally appear spontaneously; there is almost always some linkage to members of former jihadist groups.”³²

Lorenzo Vidino similarly argues that the jihadist threat in Europe is not purely internal. Using categories based on how and when individual terrorists entered Europe and were radicalized, he proposes three types of jihadists: “imported” jihadists (veteran terrorists from Muslim countries who have moved to Europe), “home-brewed” jihadists (Muslim immigrants who have become radicalized in Europe), and “homegrown” jihadists (European converts to Islam who have become radicalized).³³ Regarding the “imported” threat, Vidino references Europe’s liberal asylum system, which allowed mujahideen expatriates and other Islamic fundamentalists to immigrate to Europe beginning in the 1980s and extending to the early 2000s.³⁴ Many of these asylum seekers have been responsible for establishing radical mosques and Islamic centers across Europe. Immigrants from Muslim countries who become disillusioned or homesick sometimes turn to these radical mosques and Islamic centers where they may be recruited to the jihadist cause, forming Vidino’s “home-brewed” category.³⁵ European converts to radical Islam, who pose the “homegrown” threat, do not all fit a standard profile, but most tend to feel disconnected from their families, jobs, or even society as a whole.³⁶ A large subgroup of these converts are second- or third-generation Muslim immigrants or children of mixed marriages, who tend to live at the margins of society and may experience confusion resulting from mixed identities.³⁷ In addition, prisons serve as centers of radicalization and recruitment, producing “homegrown” jihadists characterized by a dangerous combination of

³² Ibid., p. 33.

³³ Lorenzo Vidino, *Al Qaeda in Europe: The New Battleground of International Jihad*, Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2006, pp. 24-54.

³⁴ The UK granted asylum to some Taliban fighters as recently as 2002 (Ibid., p. 47).

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 41-2, 44.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 26.

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 33-4.

criminal know-how and radical Islamic beliefs.³⁸ A particularly dangerous subgroup of “homegrown” jihadists are the lone wolves, whose lack of affiliations with a larger network make them difficult to identify and monitor.³⁹ Vidino concludes by noting that “the profile of the Islamic radical operating on the Continent varies widely.”⁴⁰

After examining the work of such scholars as Jordán et al. and Vidino, Bale developed his own classification scheme. While Vidino focuses on characteristics of jihadist *individuals*, Bale, like Jordán et al., focuses on characteristics of jihadist *cells*. By presenting a very detailed classification scheme, Bale’s study examines the exact nature of the connections and affiliations of jihadist cells and their members. He divides jihadist groups into five main categories:⁴¹ (1) “hit teams,” which resemble the “hit squads” described by Jordán et al. and which are composed of jihadists sent from abroad by al-Qaeda, al-Qaeda regional affiliates, or other veteran jihadist organizations; (2) “local jihadist cells organized, supported, or directed from abroad,” which are recruited and trained by al-Qaeda, its regional affiliates, or other veteran jihadist groups, and then placed in Europe where they are occasionally given assistance and/or direction; (3) “local jihadist cells formed by militants who had previously been radicalized and recruited by, or otherwise closely associated with, earlier local cells established by operatives working for foreign terrorist groups”; (4) “connected self-generating” cells, which are in direct or indirect contact with al-Qaeda, its affiliates, other veteran jihadist groups, or other European self-generating cells; and (5) “isolated or fully autonomous self-generating” cells, which are unaffiliated with members of any other jihadist groups or cells. Using the 3/11 Madrid train bombings as a case study, Bale examines the complicated network of relationships and

³⁸ Ibid., p. 31.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 30.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 62.

⁴¹ Bale, “Jihadist Cells and 'I.E.D.' Capabilities in Europe,” pp. 62-3.

affiliations surrounding each of the perpetrators and reaches the preliminary conclusion that the direct and indirect connections of European jihadist groups with other jihadist networks, whether they are based in Europe or abroad, are important factors to consider when determining the operational capabilities of jihadist cells in the West.⁴²

Based on these studies of jihadism in Europe, it is clear that homegrown terrorism is a growing threat. The European jihadist movement is primarily composed of European residents who are radicalized within Europe and who are planning attacks against European targets. However, a number of scholars argue that many of the jihadist groups still retain direct or indirect connections with veteran jihadist organizations. Therefore, the extent of the homegrown threat in comparison to the threat posed by foreign, foreign-directed, or foreign-affiliated groups is still unclear.

As ambiguous as the literature on Europe may appear, even less attention has been given to jihadism in the US. Vidino attributes this inattention to the widespread and inaccurate belief that homegrown jihadist terrorism is a relatively recent threat and that it has been largely confined to Europe, and he provides anecdotal evidence of “a long history of homegrown networks inspired by radical Islam operating within the United States.”⁴³ He argues that although homegrown terrorist networks have recently become more numerous and dangerous, they have existed for at least three decades, and although they are more prevalent in Europe, they also exist in the US.⁴⁴

⁴² Ibid., p. 68. Bale notes that the case study “enables us to undermine, though not entirely demolish, certain problematic notions currently being peddled by Sageman and his acolytes concerning the supposedly amateurish, unconnected nature of jihadist cells in the West” (p. 68).

⁴³ Lorenzo Vidino, “Homegrown Jihadist Terrorism in the United States: A New and Occasional Phenomenon?” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 32 (2009), pp. 2, 1.

⁴⁴ In *Leaderless Jihad*, Sageman presents an opposite view of American jihadism (although he mentions it only in passing): “Global Islamist terrorist attacks in the United States are unlikely because the al Qaeda ideologies do not resonate with the personal experience of American Muslims” (p. 139).

Vidino differentiates between three periods of jihadism in the US. The first, which lasted from the 1960s to the 1990s, was characterized by African-American converts to Islam.⁴⁵ In the 1980s, some of these converts traveled to Afghanistan to fight against the Soviets. Many networks set up to recruit and fundraise for the war in Afghanistan continued to operate after the war ended, and in the 1990s, Vidino's second period, American converts continued to travel to Afghanistan and Pakistan for training. According to counterterrorism expert Robert Blitzer, who headed the FBI's first task force on Islamic fundamentalism, as many Americans as Europeans traveled to Afghanistan and Pakistan during the 1990s.⁴⁶ The 9/11 attacks mark the beginning of the third period of American jihadism, during which there was a substantial increase in the number of jihadist cells in the US, many of which contained both foreign jihadists and homegrown terrorists. Vidino provides two explanations for this increase: the 9/11 attacks served as a call to arms for jihadist sympathizers who had not yet taken action, and American security forces paid more attention to jihadist networks and therefore uncovered a larger number of cells.⁴⁷ Although a number of the post-9/11 American jihadists were recruited by foreign jihadist networks, "most of the attacks that have been plotted against the United States since 2001 have been conceived by purely homegrown, operationally independent, and, for the most part, quite amateurish clusters."⁴⁸ Jihadism in the US has morphed into a homegrown threat, thus the jihadist threat in the US is similar in nature, if not in scale, to the jihadist threat in Europe.

A report prepared by the New York Police Department (NYPD) compares the current European and American jihadist movements and comes to a similar conclusion that despite

⁴⁵ For details on the first period see: Vidino, "Homegrown Jihadist Terrorism in the United States," pp. 3-5.

⁴⁶ Quoted in Vidino, "Homegrown Jihadist Terrorism in the United States," p. 5.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

differences in magnitude the two jihadist threats have many common characteristics.⁴⁹ The report explains that Europe has frequently functioned as an asylum for diaspora communities and that the failure of European nations to integrate second- and third-generation Muslim immigrants into society has encouraged the spread of radicalization across the continent.⁵⁰ On the other hand, because of the assimilating nature of American society, Muslims in the US appear to be “more resistant, but not immune” to radical Islam.⁵¹ To support its claim that jihadism has less sway in the US, the report highlights the fact that the US has not yet experienced a homegrown jihadist attack, and the plots that have been discovered have been less severe than those in Europe.⁵²

The report then approaches jihadism from the individual (rather than organizational) level, and it examines the radicalization process by which an individual becomes a jihadist terrorist. Using case studies of five plots in Europe and five in the US, the report concludes that despite the difference in scale between the American and the European threats, American jihadists undergo the same radicalization process as do European jihadists.⁵³ The process described by the report is primarily self-motivated (rather than recruitment-based) and progresses through four stages: pre-radicalization (i.e., an individual’s life before joining the Salafi Islam community), self-identification (i.e., a personal crisis that causes the individual to turn to Salafi Islam), indoctrination (i.e., the individual’s acceptance of the Salafi ideology), and jihadization (i.e., the individual’s commitment to pursue violent jihad).⁵⁴ The report concludes that although al-Qaeda has provided inspiration for these radicalized individuals, it no longer has direct control

⁴⁹ Mitchell D. Silber, and Arvin Bhatt, “Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat,” New York City Police Department, 2007.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 8, 56.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 8.

⁵² Ibid., p. 56.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 6-7.

over the radicalization process.⁵⁵ In the case studies examined, the jihadist groups generally “have little or no links to known militant groups or actors. Rather they are like-minded individuals who spend time together in clusters organized, originally, by previously established social network links.”⁵⁶ Like Vidino, the NYPD report reaches the conclusion that jihadism in the US has become a primarily homegrown phenomenon.

The work of these scholars makes it apparent that the jihadist threat to the West is a dynamic one, which has changed since the days of the mujahideen fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan. Attempting to depict all (or even most) participants in the current jihadist movement as fitting a common mold is a dangerous prospect because it glosses over important differences. At the very least, different categories must be sketched to acknowledge the variation within the jihadist movement. However, recognizing this variation (in training and affiliations) has limited usefulness without an understanding of its impact on the operational effectiveness of jihadist terrorists. As described in the following section, a number of scholars have researched the process by which terrorists learn and the influence of learning on their ability to carry out successful attacks. Furthermore, some have explored the relationships between training, affiliations, and operational effectiveness.

Training, Affiliations, and Operational Effectiveness

To conduct even a simple bombing, a terrorist or group of terrorists must execute multiple steps, including acquiring the explosive materials, fabricating the bomb, surveying the target, and planting and detonating the bomb. These steps must be completed without arousing the suspicion of the local security forces. To accomplish these tasks, terrorists need not only

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 82.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 85.

technical knowledge (i.e., the step-by-step instructions of how to build a bomb or how to survey a target) but also hands-on experience (i.e., a more intimate understanding of the skills that cannot be expressed in an instruction manual). Michael Kenney refers to these two types of knowledge as *techne* and *metis*.⁵⁷

Kenney defines *techne* as “abstract technical knowledge...[which] lends itself to codification in knowledge-based artifacts and can be readily taught through formal instruction,” while *metis* is “experiential knowledge and cunning intelligence...[needed] to develop the practical expertise that allows them [terrorists] to perform violent acts in local settings.”⁵⁸ Unlike *techne*, which can be learned through instruction manuals and videos, *metis* can only be acquired (to the extent that it can be acquired) through personal instruction and hands-on experience. Mechanisms for transmitting *metis* include “informal apprenticeships” (with veteran jihadists), “on-the-job training,” “communities of practice” (i.e., social networks that allow participants to share norms, practices, tips, etc.), and “combat” (which fosters these communities).⁵⁹ According to Kenney, the role played by *metis* in a terrorist’s learning process is as significant, if not more significant, than that played by *techne*, and both are needed for a terrorist to learn effectively (e.g., to carry out a bombing, to adapt in response to counterterrorism measures, etc.).

⁵⁷ Michael Kenney, “Organizational Learning and Islamic Militancy,” NCJRS, May 2009.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 4. Other scholars, including Brian A. Jackson, distinguish between *explicit* knowledge, “knowledge that is preserved in a physical form,” and *tacit* knowledge, “more-abstract knowledge held by individuals” (Brian A. Jackson, *Aptitude for Destruction, Volume 1: Organizational Learning in Terrorist Groups and Its Implications for Combating Terrorism*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2005, pp. 14, 15). While explicit knowledge is simply a synonym for *techne*, tacit knowledge differs from *metis* because the latter emphasizes “cunning” or “crafty” intelligence in addition to informal or abstract knowledge. Jeffery Bale defines tacit knowledge as “informal personalized knowledge gained through sometimes unique individual experiences, which often manifests itself in the form of subjective insights, intuitions, and hunches,” but emphasizes the more subtle nature of *metis*, which “is manifested through traits such as dexterity, ingenuity, improvisation, and overall adaptability” (Bale, p. 12).

⁵⁹ Michael Kenney, *From Pablo to Osama: Trafficking and Terrorist Networks, Government Bureaucracies, and Competitive Adaptation*, University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007, p. 145.

After describing these mechanisms of learning, Kenney uses the Madrid and London bombings as case studies and argues that “Islamic militants learn—but not particularly well.”⁶⁰ He states that a number of factors account for poor terrorist tradecraft, including “*mētis* [*sic*] in guerrilla warfare that does not translate particularly well to urban terrorism, the difficulty of acquiring mission-critical experience when the attack or counter-terrorism response leads to the death of the perpetrators, a hostile counter-terrorism environment that makes it hard to plan and coordinate attacks or develop adequate training facilities, and perpetrators’ ideological or religious certitude that they don’t need to be too careful because their fate is already determined by Allah.”⁶¹ In particular, Kenney emphasizes the hostile operating environment and the resultant need for secrecy as a cause of poor tradecraft.

Bale, on the other hand, offers a different explanation for poor terrorist tradecraft: insufficient affiliation with veteran jihadists. Autonomous, homegrown jihadist groups lack the organizational mechanisms that facilitate the process of acquiring and sharing *techne* and *metis*; they lack both the formal mechanisms (such as, training camps and training manuals) and the informal ones (such as, apprenticeships and friendships). Thus, these homegrown cells are hindered in their learning capabilities and find it more difficult to acquire the necessary knowledge to launch effective attacks than do cells that are somehow linked to the larger global jihadist movement. This is not to say that autonomous groups are incapable of launching effective attacks;⁶² they are simply less likely to do so.

Using the Madrid train bombing (March 2004) and the failed German train bombing (July 2006) as case studies, Bale explores the perpetrators’ complex networks of social

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 125.

⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 130-1.

⁶² As Bale notes, amateur terrorists occasionally construct deadly bombs “either by imaginatively applying their existing levels of technical knowledge or by following detailed step-by-step instructions found in manuals, even without having had the benefit of direct personal instruction from an experienced bomb-maker” (Bale, p. 11).

relationships and the effects these networks had on the success or failure of the attack. Regarding the Madrid bombings, he explains that, despite claims that the bombers were a group of self-starting amateurs, they in fact had important affiliations with al-Qaeda and other global jihad groups in the past as well as during the planning and preparation phases of the attack. Ten individuals involved in the plot were formerly members of Abu Dahdah's al-Qaeda network in Spain, one of whom was also an important figure in al-Salafiyya al-Jihadiyya (a Moroccan jihadist group) and another in the Moroccan Islamic Fighting Group (or, GICM).⁶³ Furthermore, several operatives had personal connections with high-ranking members of al-Qaeda.

Despite Bale's detailed account of the histories and affiliations of the various cell members, it is unclear how these network connections contributed to successful execution of the bombing. Bale notes that several of the operatives were trained overseas in al-Qaeda camps and that the group may have received bomb-making instructions from a key figure in al-Qaeda's logistical network in Italy. However, Bale could not trace the impact of this training and expertise on the bomb-making process because he was unable to identify which of the terrorists actually fabricated the bombs.⁶⁴

In contrast to the Madrid bombers, the German train bombers had no clear links with a larger organization, but there are several theories that the terrorists were somehow affiliated with or influenced by al-Qaeda, Hizb al-Tahrir al-Islami (a London-based Jordanian jihadist group), or Fath al-Islam (a Beirut-based group).⁶⁵ Whether or not these theories prove true, it is known that the terrorists built the bombs themselves, using instructions found on a video from a jihadist

⁶³ Bale, p. 40.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 63.

⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 72-3.

website.⁶⁶ The instructions lacked some vital information, and both bombs constructed by the terrorists failed to detonate because the terrorists made a minor mistake in their fabrication.

Based on these two cases, Bale draws some “provisional conclusions,” emphasizing that they are not generalizable or predictive. Of these, the most important for my research are his suppositions that “jihadist cells whose members are linked in various ways to veteran terrorist organizations, or perhaps even to experienced criminal networks, are arguably much more likely to be able to carry out successful IED [i.e., improvised explosive device] attacks and campaigns than those who are members of unconnected or unaffiliated groups” and that “small cells that happen to include or interact directly with individuals with bomb-making experience are more likely to be able to carry out destructive IED attacks and longer-term IED campaigns.”⁶⁷ He offers further explanation for the former, indicating that groups with affiliations are more likely to come into contact with people who “can muster sufficient resources, operate well clandestinely, or perhaps even provide hands-on training in bomb-making.”⁶⁸ In essence, Bale suggests a correlation between a group’s connectedness and its success as well as between its training and success.

In Sageman’s works, he also indicates a correlation between training and effectiveness; however, unlike Bale, he argues that there is no relationship between proximity to al-Qaeda and success. According to Sageman, because the jihadist movement in the West is almost exclusively homegrown and self-trained, there has been a decline in the quality of operations and tradecraft in the past few years.⁶⁹ Homegrown terrorists may perform paramilitary exercises together (such as playing paintball or organizing paramilitary camping trips), and they may acquire bomb-

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 70-1.

⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 75, 76.

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 75-6.

⁶⁹ Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad*, p. 140.

making instructions from the internet, but these practices are no substitute for the organized training received by jihadists at al-Qaeda training camps in Afghanistan in the 1990s.⁷⁰ Even the newly established training camps in the Waziristan region of Pakistan, which (according to Sageman) have had no effect on jihadist plots in the West, cannot measure up to the old Afghan training camps.⁷¹ In addition to the lack of organized training, the decline of centralized al-Qaeda recruitment has contributed to the decreasing caliber of terrorist wannabes. Now, anyone who wants to pick up a weapon or build a bomb in the name of Allah can consider himself a jihadist. As a result, “the average third-wave global Islamist terrorist is far less skilled and adept than the terrorists prior to 9/11.”⁷²

Using a dataset of all al-Qaeda-directed, -affiliated, and -inspired plots in the West since August 1988, Sageman compared the level of training of a given jihadist group (al-Qaeda-trained, al-Qaeda affiliate-trained, or untrained) to the success of the group’s attack (successful, failed, or foiled).⁷³ Based on his results, Sageman concludes that formal training substantially improves a group’s probability of success: “Both al Qaeda core [*sic*] and al Qaeda affiliate formal training resulted in an approximate success rate of 20%, while lack of training led to a success rate of 10%. So, training doubles the probability of success in a terrorist network.”⁷⁴ However, Sageman also states that al-Qaeda training does not indicate al-Qaeda control (i.e., al-Qaeda “directed and controlled the operation”),⁷⁵ and furthermore, that al-Qaeda control does not necessarily improve effectiveness: “It is interesting to note that for all the fear of al Qaeda, the

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Sageman, *Confronting al-Qaeda*, pp. 11-2.

⁷² Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad*, p. 141.

⁷³ The dataset is not publicly available.

⁷⁴ Sageman, *Confronting al-Qaeda*, p. 14. It should be noted that the probability of success is *only* 20% even with training. Such a low probability may be explained by Sageman’s conclusion that lack of training is not the primary cause of failure. Most of the failed attacks in his dataset (6 of 10) were perpetrated by experienced terrorists who simply made a mistake in the execution, therefore the failures were caused by poor execution rather than poor training (p. 14).

⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 4, 11.

organization managed only two successful plots in the West in the last twenty years [9/11 and 7/7]! ... Indeed, successful independent plots outnumber successful al Qaeda plots in the West.”⁷⁶ Sageman’s study shows a clear link between training and effectiveness, but he discounts the importance of proximity to veteran jihadist organizations because his classification scheme focuses solely on direct operational connections between veteran jihadist organizations and European cells and overlooks the multitude of indirect personal affiliations that Bale explores in his study and that may contribute to a terrorist’s training.

While Bale and Sageman analyze how connections and training lead to the success or failure of a plot, a study by the Homeland Security Institute (HSI) examines terrorist plot successfulness more broadly and identifies thirteen factors, ranging from terrorist operational proficiency to law enforcement knowledge, which affect the success or failure of a terrorist attack.⁷⁷ The study divides these factors into two categories: those related to the terrorists and those related to security services. Terrorist-related factors include terrorist training, technical sophistication, operational proficiency, terrorist profile indicators, terrorist operational security, innovation, and technical difficulties, while security service-related factors include target access, law enforcement or intelligence knowledge, security environment, information sharing, international cooperation, and an observant public and/or vigilant security service.⁷⁸ It is important to note that although terrorist training is only one of the seven terrorist-related factors, it influences three more factors: technical sophistication (i.e., the complexity of the plan or weapon), operational proficiency (i.e., the ability of the terrorists to carry out the plan effectively), and innovation (i.e., the originality of the tactic). However, the study also notes,

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 14.

⁷⁷ “Underlying Reasons for Success and Failure of Terrorist Attacks: Selected Case Studies.” Homeland Security Institute, 4 June 2007, http://www.homelandsecurity.org/hsireports/Reasons_for_Terrorist_Success_Failure.pdf.

⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 98-9.

“The degree to which a terrorist team is ready for execution [i.e., the teams’ training] can influence (but not always determine) the outcome of the initial stages of the attack and its consequences.”⁷⁹ The 9/11 and 7/7 attacks were successful operations executed by well-trained terrorists, and the 7/21 attack was an unsuccessful operation executed by poorly-trained terrorists. However, the group Aum Shinrikyo was composed of well-trained terrorists but failed to execute a fully successful sarin gas attack in Tokyo. The HSI study is important because it situates terrorist knowledge and training within the larger operational context and makes it clear that they are not the only factors influencing the effectiveness of a terrorist plot.

These studies by Bale, Sageman, and the HSI all suggest that terrorist training or knowledge influences the effectiveness of terrorist plots. Generally, training appears to have a positive influence on effectiveness (even doubling the success rate, according to Sageman); however, as the HSI report shows, training is not necessarily the determining factor in each individual case. Nonetheless, these studies have indicated at least some evidence of a correlation between knowledge or training and effectiveness. More tenuous is the correlation between effectiveness and proximity to veteran jihadists. Logically, it seems reasonable that affiliations with veteran jihadists and jihadist organizations (who have access to valuable *techné* and *metis*) would facilitate the acquisition of knowledge and training, thus improving effectiveness. However, of the three studies, Bale’s is the only one that presents a case for a correlation between effectiveness and proximity to veteran jihadists.

The Jihadist Threat to the American Homeland

This review of the literature shows that a number of scholars have mapped the jihadist landscape in the West (more so in Europe than in the US) and have analyzed the extent to which

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 85.

the jihadist movement is comprised of autonomous, self-trained homegrown groups or networked, well-trained foreign-directed cells. In addition, a number have examined the process by which a terrorist learns to carry out attacks. Bale and Sageman have taken this research a step further and have attempted to combine an understanding of the nature of the jihadist movement with an understanding of the causes for success of a plot or attack. Each used a different approach. Bale conducted a detailed qualitative analysis of two case studies, while Sageman conducted a quantitative analysis of a larger dataset of cases. They both reached the conclusion that terrorists with more training will be more likely to carry out successful attacks. Bale further concluded that if a group has more connections with veteran jihadists, it will have a higher chance of carrying out a successful attack because its members will likely have received better training than a completely autonomous, homegrown group.

Nonetheless, both studies have their shortcomings. Because Bale's study is based on only two cases, he recognizes that his conclusions are not generalizable or predictive. His research illuminates the social networks encompassing the two groups of terrorists and the process by which those social networks led to training (or lack of training) and thereby to success (or failure), but it is unclear how such mechanisms of networking and training may work in different contexts. As for Sageman's study, he analyzes the statistics regarding control by al-Qaeda, level of training, and success rate, but the numbers do not elucidate the mechanism by which training is acquired and is used to execute successful attacks.

My study undertakes a comprehensive analysis of the jihadist threat to the US by examining each plot and attack that has targeted the American homeland since 9/11, and it proposes to answer the questions posed at the beginning of this chapter: How serious is the jihadist threat to the American homeland? And, how have jihadists' training and affiliations

influenced the seriousness of the threat? In order to answer these questions, I have compiled a dataset of the twenty-six jihadist plots and attacks that targeted the US since 9/11. I used datasets of US jihadist plots, attacks, and offenders compiled by The Heritage Foundation⁸⁰ and the National Institute of Justice⁸¹ as starting points, and then, I added or subtracted plots and attacks based on my own criteria, as follows. I include all jihadist plots and attacks whose target was within the American homeland regardless of the location of the perpetrators during their planning and preparatory phases (i.e., inside or outside of the US). I exclude individuals arrested for supporting jihadist groups, training with them, or fighting with them against American troops abroad if the individuals were not also involved in a specific plot against the American homeland. Furthermore, I exclude plots whose perpetrators had not yet selected a specific target as well as plots in which FBI involvement was so pervasive that it is unclear whether the plot would have existed independently.

For each plot and attack in my dataset, I gathered information on the details of the plot or attack, the training received by the perpetrators, and the affiliations that the perpetrators established (or failed to establish) with other jihadist groups. I primarily used US court documents to compile this information, and I supplemented them with media reports and official press releases. Using this information, I determined the seriousness of the threat each plot or attack posed to US homeland security as well as the influence the perpetrators' training and affiliations had on the plot or attack's seriousness. The result, presented in the remaining chapters, is a comprehensive understanding of the seriousness of the jihadist threat to the American homeland and the influence of training and affiliations.

⁸⁰ James Jay Carafano, "U.S. Thwarts 19 Terrorist Attacks Against America Since 9/11" (The Heritage Foundation, November 13, 2007).

⁸¹ David Schanzer, Charles Kurzman, and Ebrahim Moosa, "Anti-Terror Lessons of Muslim-Americans" (National Institute of Justice, January 6, 2010).

Chapter 2

Jihadism Against the American Homeland: A Serious Threat or an Exaggerated Nuisance?

“Important progress has been made against the threat to the US Homeland over the past few years, but I cannot reassure you that the danger is gone. We face a persistent terrorist threat from al-Qa’ida and potentially others who share its anti-Western ideology. A major terrorist attack may emanate from either outside or inside the United States.”⁸² This was the warning issued by Director of National Intelligence Dennis C. Blair to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence in February 2010, during his presentation of the Intelligence Community’s annual threat assessment. In the testimony, he emphasized the continued threat posed to the American homeland from al-Qaeda, al-Qaeda affiliates, and homegrown terrorists, and he also stated that he believed another terrorist attack attempt in the next six months was “certain.”⁸³

Despite the dire tone of Blair’s warning, some scholars and journalists question whether Blair and others have overstated the seriousness of the jihadist terrorist threat. In a 2006 *Foreign Affairs* article, John Mueller points to the lack of attacks in the US since 9/11 as proof of threat

⁸² Dennis C. Blair, *Annual Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community*, Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, 2010.

⁸³ Joby Warrick and Peter Finn, “Al-Qaeda is a wounded but dangerous enemy,” *Washington Post*, February 8, 2010, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/02/07/AR2010020702984.html?sid=ST2010020801138>.

inflation: “A fully credible explanation for the fact that the United States has suffered no terrorist attacks since 9/11 is that the threat posed by homegrown or imported terrorists -- like that presented by Japanese Americans during World War II or by American Communists after it -- has been massively exaggerated.”⁸⁴ He suggests that the 9/11 attacks may have been counterproductive for al-Qaeda and al-Qaeda-inspired terrorists because it spurred governments to take action against terrorism, and as a result, terrorists have not been “trying very hard to repeat 9/11.”⁸⁵ However, it seems just as plausible that the 9/11 attacks have served as a rallying cry for jihadist terrorists, who had previously seen the US as an impossible target, and the only reason the US has avoided a major attack since 9/11 is because of the relentless efforts of American military and security services. This debate regarding the seriousness of the terrorist threat has major policy implications for the American counterterrorism strategy and thus requires further investigation.

Over the past decade, jihadist terrorists have attempted to attack the US 26 times,⁸⁶ but only three attempts have caused any casualties: a 2002 shooting at the El Al ticket counter in Los Angeles International Airport, a 2009 shooting at Fort Hood, and another at the military recruiting center in Little Rock. These attacks were not nearly as sophisticated or as destructive as the 9/11 attacks, but they nonetheless caused loss of life and induced fear in the American public. Given that only three out of 26 plots came to fruition, the natural question is: Were the other plots amateurish and inconsequential, or did they have the potential to cause physical and

⁸⁴ John Mueller, “Is There Still a Terrorist Threat?: The Myth of the Omnipresent Enemy,” *Foreign Affairs* (October 2006), <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/61911/john-mueller/is-there-still-a-terrorist-threat-the-myth-of-the-omnipresent-en?page=show>.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ This number is based on a dataset I have compiled of jihadist plots in the US, using court documents and media reports. It includes only those plots in which the terrorists had at least reached the point of selecting the targets for the attacks, and thereby excludes plots which were in the very early stages of planning.

psychological destruction if they had succeeded? In other words, how dangerous have jihadist plots against the US homeland been in the past decade?

In order to answer these questions, I have examined all jihadist plots targeting the American homeland (whether they were planned inside or outside of the US) between September 2001 and December 2009.⁸⁷ In order to determine the “seriousness” of each plot, I have considered three questions: (1) How close was the plot to execution? (2) How feasible would the plot have been if it had reached the point of execution? (3) How consequential would the attack have been if it had succeeded?

The purpose of the first question is to determine how advanced each plot was. In order to do so, I have ranked each plot along a scale with successful attacks at one extreme and vague plots (i.e. those that had only reached the idea stage) at the other. I have placed each plot into one of the following categories: (1) the plot resulted in a successful attack; (2) the perpetrators launched an attack, but it failed due to an error in the tradecraft; (3) the perpetrators acquired the explosives or weapons needed for the attack or had plans to do so, but the plot was foiled before the attack was launched; and (4) the perpetrators identified a target or target type but had not yet attempted to acquire explosives or weapons.

This ranking, however, does not tell the whole story; it must be supplemented by an understanding of each plot’s feasibility. Even if the terrorists reached the final stages of their planning, the plot would be far less “serious” if it was likely to fail upon execution. For example, in 2002, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed (KSM), the architect of the 9/11 plot, suggested that Jose Padilla, an American-born al-Qaeda operative, and his accomplice rent an apartment in each of twenty apartment buildings with natural gas heating, seal the apartments, turn on the gas, and set

⁸⁷ For the details of my dataset, see the Appendix.

timers to detonate the buildings simultaneously.⁸⁸ It is simply not realistic to think that two operatives could rent apartments in twenty different buildings without raising suspicion, and then detonate them simultaneously, even if they did succeed in acquiring the necessary explosives. The feasibility question can be rephrased as: How realistic are the terrorists' expectations of success given their resources and the nature of their target? The question of feasibility is more difficult to answer than the question about "advancedness" because doing so relies on a counterfactual analysis that tries to predict what might have happened if circumstances had been different. In answering this question, I rely on statements by security and law enforcement authorities or other knowledgeable individuals or officials.⁸⁹

In addition to feasibility, it is important to consider each attack's consequentiality. In order to determine how consequential each attack would have been, I consider the predicted number of casualties, extent of physical or economic damage, and severity of psychological impact. Again, I rely on statements by authorities, and in determining the psychological impact, I consider the symbolic value of the target.⁹⁰ Prominent targets have symbolic value if an attack against them causes serious damage and distress, but seemingly insignificant targets can also have symbolic value if the attack serves as a reminder to the target population that the terrorist perpetrators are an ever-present threat.⁹¹

⁸⁸ It should be noted that Jose Padilla recognized the infeasibility of this plot and abandoned it in favor of a plot targeting three apartment buildings. "Summary of Jose Padilla's Activities with Al Qaeda" (Department of Defense, May 28, 2004), <http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/DODsummary.pdf>.

⁸⁹ I recognize that authorities may distort the truth in their statements. They may imply that the plot was less feasible than it actually was in order to cover up target weaknesses, dissuade future attack attempts by potential terrorists, or reassure the public. On the other hand, they may imply that the plot was more feasible than it actually was in order to encourage public vigilance.

⁹⁰ I face the same difficulties as in the previous question because determining consequentiality involves counterfactuals and because authorities have an incentive to distort the truth.

⁹¹ C. J. M. Drake, *Terrorists' Target Selection* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1998), pp. 10-1.

In order to be considered a serious plot in this study, the plot must be classified as at least a Class 3 plot (i.e., the terrorists acquired some or all of the weapons, explosives, or explosive materials needed for the attack). In addition, it needs to be considered feasible as well as consequential. Based on these criteria, of the 26 jihadist plots targeting the US between 2001 and 2009, I label seven as “serious” plots, five of which were bombings and two were shootings.

In my analysis I will examine the bombings and shootings separately because of the inherent differences between the two tactics. Bombings tend to be considered a more advanced tactic; they require more extensive planning and preparation and more specialized training (for both the preparation and the execution of the attack). A would-be bomber must either acquire the materials necessary to build a bomb and then fabricate it, which requires technical expertise, or he must find someone who will provide him with the bomb. Either way, the process of acquiring the bomb is substantially more difficult than the process for obtaining a firearm for a shooting. Furthermore, the execution of a bombing attack is more complicated than that of a shooting; the bomber must successfully smuggle the bomb near or into the target, place the bomb (if it is not a suicide attack), and light the fuse.⁹² On the other hand, a shooter must simply approach or enter his target with a concealed weapon and then begin shooting. Because of the complexity of bombings in both the planning and execution phases, there are more opportunities for mistakes as well as more chances for law enforcement officials to uncover the plot. As terrorism expert Brian Jenkins has commented, “It is noteworthy that the only terrorist attackers to succeed in

⁹² This final step (lighting the fuse) may appear straightforward, but causing the detonation of an explosive can be technically difficult. The inability to properly ignite explosive devices caused the failure of three plots against the US in the past decade.

killing anyone in the United States since 9/11 were lone gunmen. Authorities managed to thwart all of the other plots.”⁹³

Although shootings tend to be more successful, they are not necessarily as consequential, largely because they usually cause fewer casualties and prefer softer targets. For example, the 2002 shooting at the El Al ticket counter at Los Angeles International Airport, which caused six casualties, did not receive nearly as much media coverage as the Richard Reid shoe bombing attempt on a flight to Miami in December 2001, which caused no casualties because it failed. There are two reasons for this apparent discrepancy. First, if successful, the bombing would have killed a much larger number of people, nearly 200. Second, and perhaps more importantly, the bombing was directed at a target that was more psychologically sensitive for the public; the US has invested so many resources in airport security that for Reid to get the bomb past security was in itself a success. Of the 26 plots and attacks identified in this study, eight were shootings, and of these, three were successful. However, only one can be classified as “serious” because the other two were not sufficiently consequential.

After examining the serious bombings and shootings since 9/11, this analysis finds that the threat posed by jihadist terrorism in the US has not diminished in recent years and may have even increased. Each of the seven plots reached an advanced stage of planning or even execution. One of the plots caused over forty casualties; two others would have downed large passenger aircraft if the bombers had successfully ignited their explosives; and the remaining four were within days or weeks of execution. Each plot is described in detail in the following sections to demonstrate that its “advancedness,” feasibility, and consequentiality qualify it as a serious plot.

⁹³ Brian Michael Jenkins, “Going Jihad: The Fort Hood Slayings and Home-Grown Terrorism” (Testimony before the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, United States Senate, November 19, 2009).

Table 1: Jihadist Plots Against the US, September 2001 – December 2009

Perpetrator(s)	Date (of First Arrest)	Target	Explosives or Firearms	Class
Richard Colvin Reid*	12/22/2001	Paris-Miami American Airlines flight	Explosives	2
Jose Padilla	05/08/2002	High-rise apartments in US cities	Explosives	4
Hesham Mohamed Ali Hadayet	07/04/2002	El Al ticket counter at Los Angeles International Airport	Firearms	1
Iyman Faris	03/01/2003	Brooklyn Bridge and a mall in Columbus, OH	Explosives	4
Ahmed Omar Abu Ali	06/08/2003	President Bush and commercial jets transiting US airspace	Explosives	4
Dhiren Barot*	08/03/2004	IMF and World Bank headquarters in DC, NYSE and Citigroup buildings in NYC, and Prudential building in Newark	Explosives	3.5
James Elshafay and Shahawar Matin Siraj	08/27/2004	Herald Square subway station in NYC	Explosives	4
Levar Washington, Gregory Patterson, Hammad Samana, and Kevin James*	08/02/2005	10 military recruitment offices, El Al at LAX, National Guard facilities in LA, Israeli consulate in LA, and synagogues and other Jewish targets in LA	Firearms	3
Michael C. Reynolds	12/05/2005	Williams natural gas refinery in WY, Transcontinental Pipeline, and Standard Oil refinery in NJ	Explosives	4
Syed Haris Ahmed and Ehsanul Islam Sadequee	03/23/2006	Dobbins Air Reserve Base in Marietta, US Capitol, Pentagon, World Bank headquarters, Dept. of Energy headquarters, a Masonic temple in VA, and large fuel storage tanks in VA	Explosives	4
Assem Hammoud	04/27/2006	A train tunnel under the Hudson River	Explosives	4
Narseal Batiste and 6 others	06/22/2006	Sears Tower; FBI buildings in Miami, Los Angeles, New York City, Chicago, and Washington D.C; other government buildings in Miami-Dade County	Explosives	4
Abdullah Ahmed Ali and 11 others*	08/10/2006	5-10 airplanes leaving London for the US	Explosives	3
Derrick Shareef	12/06/2006	A shopping mall in Rockford, IL	Firearms	4
Mohamad Ibrahim Shnewer and 5 others	05/07/2007	Fort Dix Army base	Firearms	3
Russell Defreitais and 3 others	06/02/2007	Fuel tanks and a pipeline at New York's JFK International Airport	Explosives	4
Bryant Neal Vinas	11/14/2008	Yes (Long Island Rail Road)	Explosives	4
James Cromitie, David Williams, Onta Williams, and Laguerre Payen	05/20/2009	Military aircraft at NY Air National Guard Base in Newburgh, and a synagogue and Jewish center in the Bronx	Explosives	4

Table 1 (Continued)

Perpetrator(s)	Date (of First Arrest)	Target	Explosives or Firearms	Class
Abdulhakim Mujahid Muhammed	06/01/2009	Army Recruiting Office in Little Rock	Firearms	1
Daniel Patrick Boyd and 7 others	07/27/2009	Marine Corps Base Quantico	Firearms	4
Najibullah Zazi*	09/19/2009	Manhattan subway lines	Explosives	3
Michael Finton	09/23/2009	Federal Building in Springfield, IL	Explosives	4
Hosam Maher Husein Smadi	09/24/2009	Skyscraper in Dallas housing 5 banks, including Wells Fargo	Explosives	4
Tarek Mehanna	10/21/2009	A shopping center (generally)	Firearms	4
Malik Nidal Hasan *	11/05/2009	Fort Hood Army Base	Firearms	1
Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab*	12/25/2009	Northwest Airlines flight from Amsterdam to Detroit	Explosives	2

*Indicates a serious plot.

Serious Bombing Plots: 2001-2009

Richard Reid: The Shoe Bomber Plot (December 2001)⁹⁴

On December 22, 2001, only a couple of months after the 9/11 attacks, Richard Reid boarded an American Airlines flight from Paris to Miami and, when the airplane was mid-flight, attempted to light the fuse of an explosive embedded in the sole of his shoe. A flight attendant, who smelled the sulfur of a burning match, confronted Reid. He put the match in his mouth, and when the flight attendant went to alert the captain about Reid's behavior, he lit another.⁹⁵ Reid lit approximately six matches attempting to ignite a fuse protruding from the sole of his shoe, but he

⁹⁴ The plots described in this section will be identified by the terrorist's name (or the name of the terrorist cell's leader), the common name for the plot (based on media reports), and the month in which the terrorists were arrested.

⁹⁵ "United States of America v. Richard C. Reid; Criminal Complaint" (United States District Court, December 23, 2001), http://nefaoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/U.S._v_Reid_Complaint.pdf. See also, "United States of America vs. Richard Colvin Reid; Government's Sentencing Memorandum" (United States District Court, District of Massachusetts, January 17, 2003), <http://news.findlaw.com/hdocs/docs/reid/usreid11703gsentm.pdf>.

only succeeded in melting it,⁹⁶ likely because it was damp from the rainy Paris weather.⁹⁷ When the flight attendant returned and saw the wires protruding from Reid's shoe, she tried to pull it away from him. A struggle ensued, but with the help of another flight attendant and several passengers, the shoe was confiscated, and Reid was strapped to his seat and sedated until the airplane's emergency landing in Boston.⁹⁸

Upon further inspection of Reid's shoes by the FBI, it was determined that the waffle-patterned soles of both shoes had been packed with pentaerythritol tetranitrate (PETN), a plastic high-explosive.⁹⁹ A detonating cord was laced throughout the sole of each shoe and was connected to an improvised detonator and a safety fuse.¹⁰⁰ Further testing by the FBI concluded that the devices in Reid's shoes were functioning explosive devices that would have detonated if the fuse had been lit properly.¹⁰¹ Additionally, if one of the devices had exploded near or against the interior wall of the aircraft where Reid was seated (in a window seat about halfway along the length of the airplane), the explosion would have ripped through the outside wall of the aircraft.¹⁰²

A nearly identical pair of shoe bombs was discovered at the residence of Sajid Badat, a British national living in Gloucester.¹⁰³ The original plan for the attack had called for two simultaneous bombings (one by Reid and another by Badat) on airplanes destined for the US, but

⁹⁶ "United States of America vs. Richard Colvin Reid; Government's Sentencing Memorandum" (United States District Court, District of Massachusetts).

⁹⁷ Paul Harris, Nick Paton Walsh, and Burhan Wazir, "The making of a human timebomb," *The Observer*, December 30, 2001, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2001/dec/30/terrorism.september111>.

⁹⁸ Pam Belluck, "Crew Grabs Man; Explosive Feared," *The New York Times*, December 23, 2001, <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/12/23/us/crew-grabs-man-explosive-feared.html>.

⁹⁹ John Meyer, Sebastian Rotella, and Majorie Miller, "Shoe-bomb suspect linked to al Qaeda," *Los Angeles Times*, December 27, 2001, <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2001/12/27/MN117153.DTL>.

¹⁰⁰ "United States of America vs. Richard Colvin Reid; Government's Sentencing Memorandum" (United States District Court, District of Massachusetts).

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ Jenny Booth, "Gloucester shoebomber jailed for 13 years," *Times Online*, April 22, 2005, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article384323.ece>.

Badat backed out a few days before the attack.¹⁰⁴ Since the explosives found in Badat's shoes were "substantially similar" to those in Reid's pair, they might also have been capable of downing an aircraft if ignited properly.¹⁰⁵

This plot was one of only two bombings between 2001 and 2009 to reach the point of execution. It was not foiled by security personnel, but rather it failed because of a technical problem. In other words, if Reid had been able to light the fuse, he would have succeeded in carrying out the attack. Furthermore, according to forensic testing, if the fuse had been lit, it is likely that the device would have exploded and caused the airplane to crash, killing all of the nearly 200 passengers and crew members on board. This large number of predicted deaths suggests not only that the plot was feasible but also that the attack would have been consequential. Additionally, if Badat had carried out his part of the attack, he could have doubled the number of expected casualties, and by making it a simultaneous bombing attack, he would have increased the attack's complexity. Moreover, because the attack would have occurred just months after the 9/11 attacks, the psychological impact would likely be larger than would otherwise be expected. The plot's proximity to success, feasibility, complexity, and consequentiality make it clear that this was a "serious" plot.

Dhiren Barot: The Financial Institutions Plot (August 2004)

On August 3, 2004, British police arrested Dhiren Barot, a British citizen who intended, in his own words, to cause "a memorable black day for the enemies of Islam."¹⁰⁶ Barot and his seven accomplices had meticulously outlined plans to carry out attacks in the US and the UK.

¹⁰⁴ "United States of America v. Zacarias Moussaoui, Stipulation Regarding Richard Reid" (The United States District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia, Alexandria Division), http://nefaoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/U.S._v_Moussaoui_StipReRichardReid.pdf.

¹⁰⁵ "Press Release: British National Indicted for Conspiring with 'Shoe Bomber' Richard Reid" (US Department of Justice, October 4, 2004), http://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/2004/October/04_crm_673.htm.

¹⁰⁶ David Stringer, "Muslim convert sentenced over plot to bomb targets in U.S., Britain," *Associated Press Worldstream*, November 7, 2006, LexisNexis Academic.

Their plots for the UK included exploding limousines filled with gas cylinders under London hotels and train stations, detonating a dirty bomb against a high-profile British target, and bombing a subway train as it passed through the tunnel under the Thames River.¹⁰⁷ In the US, Barot had selected several financial buildings as targets for bombing attacks, including the World Bank Headquarters and the International Monetary Fund Headquarters in Washington, D.C., New York Stock Exchange and Citigroup buildings in New York City, and a Prudential building in Newark.¹⁰⁸ He intended to cause the structural collapse of each target.¹⁰⁹ Although security services found no evidence that materials had been acquired to carry out the plans,¹¹⁰ it has been classified as a “serious” plot in this analysis because the plans were so detailed and well-researched that if the terrorists had acquired the explosives, the plot would have been ready for execution.

Barot’s extensive research and planning for the attacks included reconnaissance visits to the US and research using the internet and specialist libraries.¹¹¹ For example, during a reconnaissance visit to New York, Barot took two helicopter trips across Manhattan, and he recorded a one hour and twenty minute surveillance video of buildings on Broad Street and Wall Street, focusing on their security measures.¹¹² Based on his research, Barot wrote detailed reports on each of his intended American targets, which police found on a laptop in a house in Pakistan one month before Barot’s arrest.¹¹³ Each document, approximately 30 to 45 pages long, included

¹⁰⁷ Tucker Reals, “British Terror Plotter Gets Life In Prison,” *CBS News*, November 7, 2006, <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2006/11/07/world/main2158113.shtml>.

¹⁰⁸ Reals, “British Terror Plotter Gets Life In Prison.”

¹⁰⁹ “Terrorist Jailed for Life for Conspiracy to Murder in the UK and US,” Metropolitan Police Service Press Release, November 7, 2006, http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/Barot/MPS_Barot_Sentenced.pdf.

¹¹⁰ “Al-Qaeda plotter jailed for life,” *BBC News*, November 7, 2006, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/6123236.stm.

¹¹¹ “Terrorist Jailed for Life for Conspiracy to Murder in the UK and US,” Metropolitan Police Service.

¹¹² Reals, “British Terror Plotter Gets Life In Prison.” See also, “Terrorist Jailed for Life for Conspiracy to Murder in the UK and US,” Metropolitan Police Service.

¹¹³ “Al-Qaeda plotter jailed for life,” *BBC News*.

details on the organizational structure and business history of the target institution, in addition to details about the building itself, such as structural weaknesses, escape routes, security measures, and distances to the closest emergency services (e.g., fire departments and hospitals).¹¹⁴

Barot's report on the Citigroup buildings shows just how detailed his understanding was of the buildings' structures and security measures. Regarding the structure of one of the buildings, he notes, "Like the World Trade Center was, it is supported not on a steel frame but on steel load bearing walls."¹¹⁵ Furthermore, it is clear that Barot was able to conduct surveillance of the inside of the building, including the upper floors: "Getting to the higher floors is not very difficult if you go there midweek as I did."¹¹⁶ He provides advice for how other operatives may achieve similar access, stating that as long as the operative knows a couple of companies upstairs, wears appropriate attire, and has an adequate cover story, he may simply sign in at the front desk and go upstairs, even carrying a small bag or suitcase. In addition, Barot notes the location of the restrooms, commenting that they may be used to assemble the explosive, and he also warns the reader that "ALL restrooms...in America do not have fully enclosed all encompassing doors, i.e. the door is from the knee to the head of the average man. And so...if anything is being assembled there...rest it on the toilet seat!!!"¹¹⁷ It is likely that the report includes even more detailed and sensitive information because the majority of it was blacked out by the UK's Metropolitan Police Service before it was released to the public.

Authorities have not commented on the feasibility of the plan, but British prosecutor Edmund Lawson stated, "The conspiracy was in its final stages."¹¹⁸ Furthermore, if it had

¹¹⁴ "Terrorist Jailed for Life for Conspiracy to Murder in the UK and US," Metropolitan Police Service.

¹¹⁵ Dhiren Barot, "Citigroup Inc. (Dhiren Barot's targeting package)" (Released by the Metropolitan Police Service), <http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/Barot/Citigroup.pdf>.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Stringer, "Muslim convert sentenced over plot to bomb targets in U.S., Britain."

succeeded, the attack would have caused extensive physical and economic damage. Peter Clarke, then Deputy Assistant Commissioner, head of the Met Counter Terrorism Command, commented, “If he had succeeded [in carrying out his plots on both sides of the Atlantic], hundreds if not thousands could have died.”¹¹⁹ A press release by the Metropolitan Police Service similarly affirmed that the collapse of the buildings was intended to cause a “massive loss of life.”¹²⁰ Furthermore, Barot’s attacks, particularly the one targeting the NYSE, would likely have caused economic disorder in the US. A newspaper article citing British court documents noted that Barot was intent on attacking “the national economy of the Western Bloc.”¹²¹ Because of the projected lethality and economic consequentiality, in combination with the extensive surveillance and planning, Barot’s plot against financial institutions in D.C., New York, and Newark has been classified as a serious plot.

Abdullah Ahmed Ali: The Liquid Explosives Plot (August 2006)

In early August 2006, British security services conducted one of their most extensive terrorism investigations to date, involving 21 arrests, 69 searches and the confiscation of 400 computers, 200 cell phones, and 8,000 items of removable storage media.¹²² For months, British, Pakistani, and American security services had been tracking individuals involved in a plot to detonate liquid explosives on transatlantic flights from the UK to the US and Canada. The plotters intended to smuggle the explosives onto the airplanes in modified soft drink bottles. The operatives, who were primarily British citizens, had set up a “bomb factory” in an apartment in

¹¹⁹ “Terrorist Jailed for Life for Conspiracy to Murder in the UK and US” (Metropolitan Police Service).

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ “The Traveling Terrorist,” *The Telegraph*, November 7, 2006, in “The East Coast Buildings Plot” (The NEFA Foundation, October 2007), http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/East_Coast_Buildings_Plot.pdf.

¹²² “Press Release: Terrorism charges” (Metropolitan Police Service, August 21, 2006), http://nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/MetPolice_11Charged.pdf.

East London, where the police had watched them experimenting with chemicals.¹²³ The terrorists intended to use syringes to inject a peroxide-based explosive into false bottoms attached to sports drink bottles and then detonate the explosive using a common electrical device (such as a disposable camera) and hexamethylene triperoxide diamine (HMTD), a highly volatile explosive.¹²⁴ British police found several dozen liters of hydrogen peroxide as well as the necessary components for making HMTD in a partially buried suitcase in the woods near one operative's home.¹²⁵ In addition, the police discovered notes on avoiding airport security suspicions and listing details of flights to the US and Canada.¹²⁶

According to British authorities interviewed by journalist Paul Cruickshank, the terrorists were just weeks away from building the explosives and boarding the airplanes.¹²⁷ Not only was the plot close to execution, but it was also highly sophisticated. On the day of the arrests, then Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff explained, "This was a very sophisticated plan and operation. This is not a circumstance where you had a handful of people sitting around coming up with dreamy ideas about terrorist plots. The conception, the large number of people involved, the sophisticated design of the devices that were being considered, and the sophisticated nature of the plan all suggest that this group that came together to conspire was

¹²³ Don Van Natta, Jr., Elaine Sciolino, and Stephen Grey, "Details Emerge in British Terror Case," *The New York Times*, August 28, 2006, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/28/world/europe/28plot.html>.

¹²⁴ Stephen Fidler, "Three Guilty in U.K. Jet Bomb Plot," *The Wall Street Journal*, September 8, 2009, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB125233352854190305.html>. See also, Sebastian Rotella, "Dangerous, endangered: A look inside Al Qaeda," *Los Angeles Times*, April 2, 2008, <http://articles.latimes.com/2008/apr/02/world/fg-ubaida2>.

¹²⁵ Fidler, "Three Guilty in U.K. Jet Bomb Plot."

¹²⁶ "Press Release: 'Aircraft bomb' plotters guilty of conspiracy to murder" (Crown Prosecution Service, September 7, 2009), http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/CPS_opovertconvictions0909.pdf.

¹²⁷ Paul Cruickshank, "The Militant Pipeline: Between the Afghanistan-Pakistan Border Region and the West" (New America Foundation, February 2010), <http://counterterrorism.newamerica.net/sites/newamerica.net/files/policydocs/cruickshank.pdf>.

very determined and very skilled and very capable...[T]his was a plot that is certainly about as sophisticated as any we've seen in recent years, as far as terrorism is concerned.”¹²⁸

Furthermore, as a Woolwich Crown Court judge explained, it is feasible that if security services had not intervened, the plot would have succeeded.¹²⁹ According to British authorities, the explosives would have been undetectable by airport scanners and powerful enough to bring down the airplanes.¹³⁰ In addition, the Sandia National Lab tested the liquid explosives formula and determined that if a small amount of the liquid in a container was hit by a tiny burst of electricity, it would trigger a large explosion.¹³¹

If the plot had succeeded it would have caused a large number of deaths, especially if the terrorists had brought down the aircrafts over US cities, as they planned to do according to Mark Mershon, the head of the FBI's New York field office.¹³² The Head of the Crown Prosecution Service Counter Terrorism Division, Sue Hemming, confirmed the potential lethality of the attack: “These men wanted to bring down several aircraft in a short space of time, indiscriminately killing hundreds of innocent people - perhaps more if they'd succeeded in activating their devices while over cities. This was a calculated and sophisticated plot to create a terrorist event of global proportions.”¹³³ Cruickshank estimated a potential death toll of “more than 1,500 people” in addition to “significant global economic repercussions.”¹³⁴ The attack would have been very consequential not only because of the number of casualties but also

¹²⁸ “Remarks by Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff, United States Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, FBI Director Robert Mueller and Assistant Secretary for TSA Kip Hawley” (Office of the Press Secretary, August 10, 2006), http://www.dhs.gov/xnews/releases/pr_1158349691914.shtm.

¹²⁹ “Press Release: Airline bomb plotters jailed for life” (Metropolitan Police Service, September 15, 2009), http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/mps_bojinka2sentencing0909.pdf.

¹³⁰ Cruickshank, “The Militant Pipeline.”

¹³¹ “Plot Would Have Killed Thousands,” *ABC News*, August 6, 2007, <http://abcnews.go.com/WN/story?id=3451976&page=1>.

¹³² Dan Eggen, “Air Plot Said to Target Cities,” *The Washington Post*, November 2, 2006, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/11/01/AR2006110103097.html>.

¹³³ “Press Release: 'Aircraft bomb' plotters guilty of conspiracy to murder” (Crown Prosecution Service).

¹³⁴ Cruickshank, “The Militant Pipeline.”

because of the global scope of the operation. This physical and psychological impact, in combination with the feasibility of the attack and its proximity to completion, places it squarely among the serious jihadist plots against the US.

Najibullah Zazi: The Denver Plot (September 2009)

On September 8, 2009, Najibullah Zazi, an Afghan-born man living in Denver, Colorado, rented a car and drove to New York City, transporting with him the components needed to assemble bombs for his planned suicide attack on the New York subway system.¹³⁵ During the preceding months, Zazi and his co-conspirators, Zarein Ahmedzay and Adis Medunjanin, had accumulated large quantities of hydrogen peroxide and acetone products from beauty supply stores in the Denver area.¹³⁶ Hydrogen peroxide and acetone are key components for the fabrication of triacetone triperoxide (TATP), a very sensitive explosive that was used by Richard Reid as the detonator for his shoe bombs.¹³⁷ A couple of days before Zazi's road trip to New York, he rented a hotel room just outside of Denver, where the FBI have since found evidence of acetone residue in the vent above the stove, which they presume was used to heat the TATP components in order to make them highly concentrated.¹³⁸ Zazi intended to use the TATP in the detonators for bombs for three coordinated suicide attacks on Manhattan subways during rush hour.¹³⁹ Court documents suggest that Zazi succeeded in manufacturing the TATP explosives and carried them with him to New York on September 8, along with the other materials needed

¹³⁵ "Press Release: Najibullah Zazi Pleads Guilty to Conspiracy to Use Explosives Against Persons or Property in U.S., Conspiracy to Murder Abroad and Providing Material Support to Al-Qaeda" (Department of Justice, Office of Public Affairs, February 22, 2010),

http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/US_v_NajibullahZazi_dojprguilty.pdf.

¹³⁶ "United States of America v. Najibullah Zazi; Memorandum of Law in Support of the Government's Motion for a Permanent Order of Detention" (United States District Court, Eastern District of New York, September 24, 2009), http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/US_v_NajibullahZazi_detentionmemo.pdf.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ A. G. Sulzberger, "Two More Men Charged in Plot to Bomb Subways," *The New York Times*, February 25, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/26/nyregion/26terror.html>.

for the bombs.¹⁴⁰ He and his co-conspirators planned to carry out the attacks sometime between September 14 and 16, but an FBI informant alerted Zazi that he was being monitored by law enforcement.¹⁴¹ For fear of being caught, the three perpetrators discarded the explosives and bomb materials, and Zazi returned to Denver, where he was arrested a week later.¹⁴²

The imminence of the attack, coupled with the advanced stage of bomb preparation, led authorities to describe it as one of the most serious plots since 9/11. According to Attorney General Eric Holder, “This wasn’t merely an ‘aspirational’ plot with no chance of success. This plot was very serious and, had it not been disrupted, it could have resulted in the loss of American lives.”¹⁴³ Mayor Michael Bloomberg and former FBI official Tom Fuentes echoed this sentiment.¹⁴⁴ Furthermore, Georgetown University professor Bruce Hoffman explained that Zazi’s purchase of bomb-making materials and his attempt to assemble them indicated “a level of commitment” that the US had not seen in several years.¹⁴⁵

In addition to the commitment of the perpetrators, the vulnerability of the target, the New York subway system, further increased the feasibility of the plot. New York City Police Commissioner Raymond W. Kelly described the protection of American subways as “one of our top priorities” but also “[one of] our greatest challenges.”¹⁴⁶ The New York subway system has 468 stations and an average of 5 million riders a day, and the difficulty of protecting such an extensive and porous network has been made painfully clear in Madrid, London, Mumbai, and

¹⁴⁰ “Press Release: Najibullah Zazi Pleads Guilty” (Department of Justice).

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ *Wall Street Journal*, 6 October 2009, in “Recent Highlights in Terrorist Activity,” *CTC Sentinel* 2, no. 1 (November 2009), p. 24.

¹⁴⁴ A. G. Sulzberger and William K. Rashbaum, “Guilty Plea Made in Plot to Bomb New York Subway,” *The New York Times*, February 23, 2010, LexisNexis Academic; and, Kevin Johnson, “Alleged terror threat seen as ‘most serious’ since 9/11; Suspect bought chemicals to make bombs, feds say,” *USA Today*, September 25, 2009, LexisNexis Academic.

¹⁴⁵ Johnson, “Alleged terror threat seen as ‘most serious’ since 9/11.”

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

Moscow.¹⁴⁷ In fact, the Denver plot may have been designed to emulate the 2005 London bombings, for which the plotters used hydrogen peroxide-based explosives.¹⁴⁸ Hoffman even contended that Zazi's attack could have "eclipsed" the 2004 Madrid train bombings, which killed nearly 200 people.¹⁴⁹

As exhibited by past terrorist attacks on mass public transit, the consequences can be devastating to the nation physically, economically, and emotionally. If Zazi and his co-conspirators had succeeded in carrying out their plot, which authorities indicate they were only days away from doing, the number of casualties and the psychological impact may have been tremendous. Holder best summarizes the combination of "advancedness," feasibility, and consequentiality that designate the Denver plot as a serious one: "This attempted attack on our homeland was real, it was in motion, and it would have been deadly."¹⁵⁰

Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab: The Christmas Day Plot (December 2009)

On December 24, 2009, Nigerian citizen Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab boarded a flight in Amsterdam that was scheduled to arrive in Detroit the next day. Towards the end of the flight, Abdulmutallab went into the bathroom and remained there for approximately twenty minutes.¹⁵¹ When he returned to his seat shortly before landing, he covered himself with a blanket, claiming that his stomach was upset.¹⁵² Moments later, passengers heard popping noises, and some saw that Abdulmutallab's pant leg and the wall of the airplane were on fire.¹⁵³ One of the passengers

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Tom A. Peter, "US terror plot suspects to appear in court," *Christian Science Monitor*, September 21, 2009, LexisNexis Academic.

¹⁴⁹ Johnson, "Alleged terror threat seen as 'most serious' since 9/11."

¹⁵⁰ "Press Release: Najibullah Zazi Pleads Guilty" (Department of Justice).

¹⁵¹ "United States of America v. Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab; Criminal Complaint" (United States District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan, December 26, 2009),

http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/US_v_%20Abdulmutallab_complaint.pdf.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

lunged for Abdulmutallab, pulled a syringe from his grasp, and put out the fire.¹⁵⁴ With the assistance of other passengers and the crew, Abdulmutallab was subdued until the airplane could land in Detroit.

During his time in the airplane's bathroom, Abdulmutallab had prepared the components of a bomb, containing PETN, TATP, and other ingredients, which he had smuggled onto the airplane in his underwear.¹⁵⁵ Eighty grams of powdered PETN had been placed in a plastic bag that was then sown into the inner thigh of his underwear, and a syringe had been filled with a liquid explosive to ignite the PETN.¹⁵⁶ However, when Abdulmutallab attempted to inject the explosive into the PETN pouch, he only succeeded in starting a fire, rather than causing an explosion. The difficulty of initiating an explosion chemically likely accounts for Abdulmutallab's failure, as explained by Jimmie Carol Oxley, the director of the Center of Excellence in Explosives Detection, Mitigation, Response and Characterization at the University of Rhode Island at Kingston: "[Chemical initiation] takes a lot of pre-experimentation to find out what would work. He succeeded in getting a fire, but that was it."¹⁵⁷

According to one Homeland Security official, "These types of explosives do have a high failure rate; the problem is when they do explode, it's a very powerful bomb."¹⁵⁸ If Abdulmutallab had succeeded, "scores of innocent people would have been killed or injured,"

¹⁵⁴ Olusola Olaosebikan and Maduabuchi Nmeriben, "The Making of a Bomber," *The News*, January 4, 2010, Open Source Center.

¹⁵⁵ "United States of America v. Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab; Indictment" (United States District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan, Southern Division, January 6, 2010), http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/nefaUS_v_Abdulmutallab_ind.pdf.

¹⁵⁶ Bryan Walsh, "Why It's Not Easy to Detonate a Bomb on Board," *Time*, December 28, 2009, <http://www.time.com/time/health/article/0,8599,1950297,00.html>. See also, Mark Sappenfield, "Detroit attack: terrorist once again confounds airport security," *Christian Science Monitor*, December 27, 2009, LexisNexis Academic.

¹⁵⁷ Walsh, "Why It's Not Easy to Detonate a Bomb on Board."

¹⁵⁸ Audrey Hudson, "Flight security stiffened after failed plot; Suspect in Detroit attack likened to 'Shoe Bomber'," *The Washington Times*, December 27, 2009, LexisNexis Academic.

stated Attorney General Eric Holder.¹⁵⁹ David Learmount, an aviation expert, explained that Abdulmutallab's seat, a window seat located near a fuel tank, "[was] pretty much the best possible seat in the plane to have the highest chance of bringing it down."¹⁶⁰ The explosion would likely have punctured the fuselage and ruptured the fuel tank, bringing down the airplane and killing all 290 passengers and crew on board, in addition to an unknown number of victims on the ground.¹⁶¹

As indicated by a number of authorities, the Christmas Day plot bears a strong resemblance to the Shoe Bomber plot: an individual with a cleverly-disguised explosive boarded an airplane in Europe destined for the US, attempted to detonate the explosive during the flight, and failed to ignite the bomb correctly. Both Reid and Abdulmutallab were seated such that the explosion would have brought down their respective airplanes, resulting in a large loss of life, and both plots brought with them a grim reminder that despite the heightened airport security, terrorists still find innovative ways to cause destruction. In an address to the nation in the days following Abdulmutallab's arrest, President Barack Obama stated, "This was a serious reminder of the dangers that we face and the nature of those who threaten our homeland."¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ "Press Release: Nigerian National Charged with Attempting to Destroy Northwest Airlines Aircraft" (Department of Justice, Office of Public Affairs, December 26, 2009), http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/US_v_%20Abdulmutallab_dojprcompl.pdf.

¹⁶⁰ Claire Newell et al., "Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab: One Boy's Journey To Jihad," *Sunday Times Online*, January 3, 2010, Open Source Center.

¹⁶¹ Ibid. See also, "United States of America v. Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab; Criminal Complaint" (United States District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan).

¹⁶² Peter Baker and Scott Shane, "President Seeks to Reassure U.S. After Bomb Bid," *The New York Times*, December 29, 2009, LexisNexis Academic.

Serious Shooting Plots: 2001-2009

Kevin James: The L.A. Plot (August 2005)

In early July 2005, two men were arrested for a gas station robbery in Torrance, California (south of Los Angeles). Upon searching the apartment of one of the robbers, Levar Washington, police discovered a list of possible targets for armed attacks in the L.A. area and began to unravel a plot that Washington and the other robber, Gregory Patterson, were financing through gas station robberies.¹⁶³ The leader of the cell, a man named Kevin James, had been in jail since the late 1990s for armed robbery and had founded a radical Muslim prison group.¹⁶⁴ Washington first met James in 2004 in a state prison in Sacramento, where Washington was serving time for a robbery conviction. There, James converted Washington to radical Islam and convinced him to join James' group, Jamiyyat Ul-Islam Is-Saheeh (JIS). Washington was tasked with establishing an extremist cell outside the prison once he was released on parole in November 2004.¹⁶⁵

In the following months, Washington recruited Patterson as well as another man by the name of Hammad Samana, and they, with guidance from the still imprisoned James, began to assemble a plot to attack US military recruiting stations and bases as well as targets associated with Israel or Judaism in the L.A. area. They intended to execute a series of attacks using a shotgun and a .223 caliber rifle, and their first group of targets were ten military recruitment

¹⁶³ "Four charged with hatching prison terror plot," *Associated Press*, August 31, 2005, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/9148467>. See also, "Press Release: Two Plead Guilty to Domestic Terrorism Charges of Conspiring to Attack Military Facilities, Jewish Targets" (Department of Justice, United States Attorney, Central District of California, December 14, 2007), http://nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/U.S._v_James_DOJPR_GuiltyPleas.pdf.

¹⁶⁴ "Four charged with hatching prison terror plot," *Associated Press*.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid*.

offices.¹⁶⁶ Possible future targets included the counter of the Israeli airline El Al at Los Angeles International Airport (LAX), the US National Guard facilities in L.A., the Israeli consulate in L.A., and synagogues and other Jewish targets.¹⁶⁷ The plotters planned to enter each facility, open fire, and then flee by car.¹⁶⁸

According to court documents, the plotters had purchased or acquired the weapons they intended to use for the attacks. Patterson had bought a shotgun and a rifle,¹⁶⁹ and upon searching the residence of Washington and Patterson, authorities found shotgun shells, a shotgun shell carrier, knives, three tactical military vests, and camouflaged clothing.¹⁷⁰ According to security authorities, the plot had nearly reached an operational level. In an interview in October 2006 for the PBS show *Frontline*, John Miller, then the FBI's Assistant Director of Public Affairs, stated, "I think if you look at the JIS case, of all of the terrorist plots since 9/11, it is probably the one that operationally was closest to actually occurring... They had selected targets. They had chosen dates. They had obtained weapons. They had written down plans. And they were getting very close to actualizing the plot."¹⁷¹ Similarly, then L.A. Police Deputy Chief Michael Downing,

¹⁶⁶ "The L.A. Plot to Attack U.S. Military, Israeli Government, & Jewish Targets" (The NEFA Foundation, January 2007), http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/LA_Plot.pdf. Based on U.S. v. Samana, (C.D. CA.), No. 05-16662M, Affidavit of FBI Special Agent James Clinton Judd, Filed August 2, 2005.

¹⁶⁷ "United States of America v. Kevin James, Levar Washington, Gregory Patterson, and Hammad Samana; Indictment" (United States District Court for the Central District of California, August 31, 2005), http://nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/U.S._v._James_Indictment.pdf. See also, "Four charged with hatching prison terror plot," *Associated Press*.

¹⁶⁸ "The L.A. Plot to Attack U.S. Military, Israeli Government, & Jewish Targets" (The NEFA Foundation).

¹⁶⁹ "United States of America v. Kevin James, et al., Plea Agreement for Defendant Levar Washington" (United States District Court for the Central District of California, December 14, 2007), http://nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/U.S._v._Washington_PleaAgreement.pdf.

¹⁷⁰ "The L.A. Plot to Attack U.S. Military, Israeli Government, & Jewish Targets" (The NEFA Foundation). Based on U.S. v. Samana, (C.D. CA.), No. 05-16662M, Affidavit of FBI Special Agent James Clinton Judd, Filed August 2, 2005; and, Rob Harris, "Kevin James and the JIS Conspiracy," *PBS Frontline*.

¹⁷¹ Lowell Bergman and Oriana Zill de Granados, "The Enemy Within," *PBS Frontline*, October 10, 2006, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/enemywithin/etc/script.html>.

Commanding Officer, L.A.'s Counter-Terrorism and Criminal Intelligence Bureau, asserted that “this cell was closer to going operational than any [homegrown cell] we have seen post-911.”¹⁷²

Although it is clear that the plot was very advanced, its feasibility is less certain. The plotters had conducted surveillance of their targets,¹⁷³ and Patterson had some insider knowledge of LAX because he had worked at a duty-free shop in the international terminal.¹⁷⁴ However, it is unclear whether they had plausible plans to get past security at their first target and to escape capture as they progressed to the next targets in their series. Furthermore, it is unclear how consequential their attacks would have been. During an interview with an FBI agent, Washington stated that he and his accomplices estimated thirty or forty casualties from their first wave of attacks.¹⁷⁵ However, no statements by authorities have confirmed such estimates. In addition, although attacks against military targets can be devastating psychologically, especially when terrorists use them to illustrate the success of a weak enemy against American military might, military recruiting offices are not really iconic targets; they are not particularly prominent targets, nor would attacks against them be likely to sow fear in the general population about the ever-present jihadist threat. Therefore, although the L.A. plot was close to going operational, it does not seem to be as feasible or as consequential as the Shoe Bomber plot. Nonetheless, because of its proximity to execution, it is considered a serious plot in this analysis.

¹⁷² “Press Release: Two Plead Guilty to Domestic Terrorism Charges of Conspiring to Attack Military Facilities, Jewish Targets” (Department of Justice).

¹⁷³ “United States of America v. Kevin James, Levar Washington, Gregory Patterson, and Hammad Samana; Indictment” (United States District Court for the Central District of California).

¹⁷⁴ Amy Argetsinger and Dan Eggen, “L.A. Holdups Linked to Islamic Group, Possible Terrorist Plot,” *The Washington Post*, August 17, 2005, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/08/16/AR2005081601468.html>.

¹⁷⁵ “The L.A. Plot to Attack U.S. Military, Israeli Government, & Jewish Targets” (The NEFA Foundation). Based on U.S. v. Samana, (C.D. CA.), No. 05-16662M, Affidavit of FBI Special Agent James Clinton Judd, Filed August 2, 2005.

Malik Nidal Hasan: The Fort Hood Shooting (November 2009)

On November 5, 2009, Major Malik Nidal Hasan, a psychiatrist in the US Army, entered a crowded medical processing center for soldiers preparing for or returning from deployment at the Fort Hood Army Base in Texas and began firing two non-military issue pistols, ultimately killing 13 people and wounding 28.¹⁷⁶ The rampage ended when Hasan was wounded by return fire from military police and civilian officers and was taken to the hospital.¹⁷⁷ Hasan had purchased one of the pistols the summer before, and the other was given to him by his brother in Virginia.¹⁷⁸ In the days before the shooting, Hasan bought extra ammunition clips and practiced regularly at a shooting range near the base, firing more than 200 rounds two days before the shooting.¹⁷⁹ He also said goodbye to his friends at the local mosque he attended and gave away many of his possessions to his neighbors.¹⁸⁰

In recent years, Hasan had become increasingly outspoken against the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan on religious grounds.¹⁸¹ Concerned about the contradiction between his Islamic religious beliefs and his commitment to the U.S. Army and frustrated by the anti-Muslim harassment he occasionally experienced, Hasan attempted to leave the army before his

¹⁷⁶ "Nidal Malik Hasan," *The New York Times*, November 9, 2009, http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/h/nidal_malik_hasan/index.html?scp=1-spot&sq=nidal%20malik%20hasan&st=cse.

¹⁷⁷ Robert D. McFadden, "Army Doctor Held in Ft. Hood Rampage," *The New York Times*, November 5, 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/06/us/06forthood.html?_r=1.

¹⁷⁸ Julian E. Barnes, "The Nation; Discipline possible in Ft. Hood case," *Los Angeles Times*, January 15, 2010, LexisNexis Academic. See also, "After the rampage; The killings at Fort Hood," *The Economist*, November 14, 2009, LexisNexis Academic.

¹⁷⁹ Patrik Jonsson, "Fort Hood: How Nidal Malik Hasan's path turned more radical," *Christian Science Monitor* (November 17, 2009), LexisNexis Academic; and, Joseph Rhee, Mary-Rose Abraham, and Brian Ross, "Accused Fort Hood Shooter Was a Regular at Shooting Range, Strip Club," *ABC News*, November 16, 2009, <http://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/accused-fort-hood-shooter-nidal-hasan-visited-strip/story?id=9090116>.

¹⁸⁰ James C. McKinley and James Dao, "Fort Hood Gunman Gave Signals Before His Rampage," *The New York Times*, November 8, 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/09/us/09reconstruct.html?_r=1; and, "Clues Left By Fort Hood Suspect Raise Haunting Question: Should Army Have Seen It Coming?," *The Washington Post*, January 1, 2010,

<http://www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/dn/latestnews/stories/010110dnmethasanclues.3f4b199.html>. See also, Ben Conery, "Fort Hood suspect showed worrisome signs; Gave away his possessions; critical of wars," *The Washington Times*, November 7, 2009, LexisNexis Academic.

¹⁸¹ McKinley and Dao, "Fort Hood Gunman Gave Signals Before His Rampage."

commitment had ended, but after consulting a lawyer, he apparently believed it to be impossible.¹⁸² In June 2007, he was supposed to give a presentation to senior Army doctors at Walter Reed Medical Center about a medical issue, but instead he gave one entitled “The Koranic World View As It Relates to Muslims in the U.S. Military.”¹⁸³ During the presentation, he explained, “It’s getting harder and harder for Muslims in the service to morally justify being in a military that seems constantly engaged against fellow Muslims.”¹⁸⁴ Then, approximately a year before the Fort Hood shooting, Hasan gave a presentation entitled “Why the War on Terror Is a War on Islam.”¹⁸⁵ He was transferred to Fort Hood in the summer of 2009 to prepare for his deployment to Afghanistan, which, according to his cousin, “he was doing everything he could to avoid.”¹⁸⁶ Just before opening fire on November 5, Hasan shouted “Allahu akbar” (i.e., “God is great”), and according to witnesses, he discriminated between his targets, possibly trying to spare civilians while shooting soldiers.¹⁸⁷

The Fort Hood shooting is one of the worst mass shootings on an American military base, and Senator Joseph Lieberman, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, called it the biggest terrorist attack in the US since 9/11.¹⁸⁸ The shooting was shocking not only because of the large number of casualties but also because of the nature of the attack. It was an inside job perpetrated by an individual who was a military officer, a member of the community at the base, and a psychiatrist in whom many soldiers returning from Iraq and

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ “Hasan's PowerPoint Presentation to Senior Army Doctors in June 2007” (The NEFA Foundation, November 16, 2009), <http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/Hasan2.pdf>.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ McKinley and Dao, “Fort Hood Gunman Gave Signals Before His Rampage.”

¹⁸⁶ Nicholas Riccardi, “The Nation; Hasan is Charged with 13 Murders,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 13, 2009, LexisNexis Academic; and, James Dao, “Suspect Was ‘Mortified’ About Deployment,” *The New York Times*, November 5, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/06/us/06suspect.html>.

¹⁸⁷ McKinley and Dao, “Fort Hood Gunman Gave Signals Before His Rampage.”

¹⁸⁸ “Nidal Malik Hasan,” *The New York Times*; and, Jonsson, “Fort Hood: How Nidal Malik Hasan's path turned more radical.”

Afghanistan placed their trust. Furthermore, the shooting was the first and only “serious” jihadist plot (bombing or shooting) to be successfully executed since 9/11. Because of the psychological impact of the attack, as well as its deadliness, the Fort Hood shooting has been classified as a “serious” attack.

A Persistent and Serious Threat

Based on this analysis of the seven serious plots in the US between 2001 and 2009, it is clear that jihadists have continued to target the American homeland since 9/11, and furthermore, some of their plots have gone without detection until reaching the final stages of planning or even execution. It is also worth noting that three of the seven serious plots occurred in 2009, indicating that the seriousness of the jihadist threat does not seem to have diminished in recent years and may have even increased. As Michael Leiter, Director of the National Counterterrorism Center, warned the American public in the days after the Christmas Day plot, “The failed attempt [by Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab] to destroy Northwest Flight 253 is the starkest of reminders of the insidious terrorist threats we face. While this attempt ended in failure, we know with absolute certainty that Al Qaeda and those who support its ideology continue to refine their methods to test our defenses and pursue an attack on the homeland.”¹⁸⁹

Although this analysis indicates that jihadists pose a persistent and serious threat, it is necessary to recognize that these seven “serious” plots were not on the same scale as the 9/11 attacks. Mark M. Lowenthal, assistant director of the Central Intelligence Agency for analysis from 2002 to 2005, notes, “Sending one guy on one plane is a huge step down. They’re less capable, even if they’re still lethal. They’re not able to carry out the intense planning they once

¹⁸⁹ Peter Baker, “Obama Says Al Qaeda in Yemen Planned Bombing Plot, and He Vows Retribution,” *The New York Times*, January 3, 2010, LexisNexis Academic.

did.”¹⁹⁰ Furthermore, the threat from jihadist terrorism is not a daily threat nor is it one that endangers a large portion of the population. As political scientist John Mueller pithily commented in 2006, “Outside of 2001, fewer people have been killed in America by international terrorism than have drowned in toilets.”¹⁹¹ Nonetheless, jihadist terrorism should still be considered a serious threat to national security, particularly because of the fear it instills in the American public. It is the job of the US government to protect its citizens and to provide them with the peace of mind to carry on their daily lives without fear of a terrorist attack.

Given that the seven plots examined in this analysis pose a threat to US national security and given that it seems likely that serious plots will continue to arise, it is important to understand what distinguishes these plots from those that were not as advanced before they were disrupted by the police or the FBI, so that in the future, security services may recognize these indicators of “seriousness” and invest their resources accordingly. There are two possible explanations for the failure of the less “serious” plots to reach an advanced level: either the terrorists had poor-quality tradecraft or the police had high-quality tradecraft.¹⁹² In the data, there appears to be a trend of increasingly successful use of informants by the FBI. Of the seven plots occurring between 2001 and 2004, only one was disrupted using an informant, whereas five of the nine plots between 2005 and 2007 involved informants, and four of the ten plots in 2008 and 2009 involved informants. Furthermore, in press releases and media reports regarding several plots in 2006, a number of authorities mentioned that security services were attempting to arrest terrorists at an earlier point in their planning. For example, during a press conference in July

¹⁹⁰ Scott Shane, “A Year of Terror Plots, Through a Second Prism,” *The New York Times*, January 12, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/13/us/13intel.html?partner=rss&emc=rss>.

¹⁹¹ John Mueller, *Overblown: How Politicians and the Terrorism Industry Inflate National Security Threats, and Why We Believe Them* (New York: Free Press, 2006), p. 13.

¹⁹² It is also possible that luck or serendipity played a role in the seriousness of some of the plots. However, because it is nearly impossible to measure, its role will be ignored for the time being.

2006, then DHS Secretary Michael Chertoff, commenting on a plot to blow up a train tunnel under the Hudson River, stated, “we did not wait, and we do not wait until the fuse is lit. We swoop in as early as possible because experience shows...that the distance between planning and actually operational activity is a very short distance.”¹⁹³ It is likely that variations in the efforts of the security services influenced the seriousness of the jihadist plots in the past decade; however, I will focus on factors related to the terrorists’ tradecraft in explaining the differences between serious and less-serious plots. In the next chapter, I will argue that the extent of a terrorist’s training and strength of his affiliations with veteran jihadists to be the primary factors in determining the “seriousness” of a plot.

¹⁹³ Transcript of press conference featuring DHS Secretary Michael Chertoff, July 7, 2006, in “The PATH Tunnel Plot,” The NEFA Foundation, June 2007, http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/PATH_Plot.pdf.

Chapter 3

The Influence of Jihadist Training and Veteran Affiliations

At the trial of Abdullah Ahmed Ali, ringleader of the 2006 liquid explosives plot, Ali testified that he and his co-conspirators had found bomb-making recipes on the internet to be “wishy-washy” and had instead sought training from explosives experts: “The whole point of us learning how to do it from someone who’s done it before – or someone [who] would know about the thing – is obviously [that] it’s quite dangerous dealing with these materials. We don’t want to injure ourselves or anything.”¹⁹⁴ Like Ali, many scholars have recognized that terrorists who receive training in explosives and tradecraft are likely to be more operationally effective than those who simply download bomb-making instructions from the internet.¹⁹⁵

In addition, some scholars argue that terrorists who are more closely affiliated with al-Qaeda or another veteran jihadist organization are likely to be more operationally effective because they are more likely to come into contact with individuals who have resources, experience operating clandestinely, and perhaps even explosives expertise.¹⁹⁶ Veteran jihadists

¹⁹⁴ Paul Cruickshank, “Homecoming: Al Qaeda Recruits a Growing Number of Americans,” *Newsweek*, September 29, 2009, <http://www.newsweek.com/id/216472>.)

¹⁹⁵ See, for example, Marc Sageman, *Confronting al-Qaeda: Understanding the Threat in Afghanistan and Beyond*, presented before the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee, 7 October 2009, p. 14.

¹⁹⁶ See, for example, Jeffrey M. Bale, “Jihadist Cells and 'I.E.D.' Capabilities in Europe: Assessing the Present and Future Threat to the West,” Monterey Institute of International Studies, 2009, pp. 75-6.

may also facilitate training by providing access to training camps or relaying personal knowledge and advice about terrorist tradecraft. In the presentation of the Intelligence Community's 2009 threat assessment, Director of National Intelligence Dennis C. Blair recognized the general ineffectiveness of homegrown terrorists with no connection to a wider jihadist network: "US Intelligence Community and law enforcement agencies with a domestic mandate assess that violence from homegrown jihadists probably will persist, but will be sporadic. A handful of individuals and small, discrete cells will seek to mount attacks each year, with only a small portion of that activity materializing into violence against the Homeland."¹⁹⁷

Despite their supposed ineffectiveness, homegrown terrorists have increasingly drawn the attention of scholars and security agencies. Many argue that the terrorist threat in the US has become one largely dominated by homegrown and poorly-trained jihadists.¹⁹⁸ FBI Director Robert Mueller has recognized the growing influence (and potential danger) of homegrown terrorists inside and outside of the US: "We are increasingly concerned with pockets of people around the world that identify with Al Qaeda and its ideology. Some may have little or no actual contact with Al Qaeda. Yet fringe organizations can quickly gain broader aspirations and appeal. And should they connect with the core of Al Qaeda, from training to the planning and execution of attacks, the game becomes radically different."¹⁹⁹

Given that well-trained and well-connected terrorists tend to be more operationally effective than homegrown terrorists, and given that the terrorist threat in the US is increasingly a homegrown one, the logical assumption is that the frequency of serious plots in the US since 9/11 has been declining. However, as was demonstrated in Chapter 2, the frequency of serious

¹⁹⁷ Dennis C. Blair, *Annual Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community*, 2010, p. 12.

¹⁹⁸ See, for example, Sageman, *Confronting al-Qaeda*, p. 6.

¹⁹⁹ "Remarks Prepared for Delivery by Robert S. Mueller, III, Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation" (Council on Foreign Relations, February 23, 2009), http://www.cfr.org/publication/18594/prepared_remarks.html.

plots has not diminished in recent years. Therefore, it must be concluded either that a terrorist's training and affiliations are not related to his plot's seriousness, or that terrorists are not less well-trained or -connected today than they were in the first few years after 9/11. This analysis actually finds that both statements are partially true. Regarding the correlation between training, affiliations, and operational effectiveness, this chapter shows that most serious plots are posed by terrorists with connections and training. Regarding the trend towards homegrown terrorism, this chapter suggests that terrorists tend to be less well-trained and -connected than previously, but cases of well-trained and -connected terrorists still emerge, and these cases account for the continued threat of serious plots.

In order to test the relationship between seriousness, training, and affiliations and to determine the nature of the threat (i.e., homegrown or al-Qaeda-connected), I have analyzed the extent of training received by the terrorists involved in each plot in my dataset (which includes all jihadist plots targeting the American homeland between September 2001 and June 2007) as well as the strength of their contacts with veteran jihadists. I have defined "training" somewhat broadly, so that it includes not only training camps and training manuals but also participation in combat and communities of practices (i.e., social networks allowing participants to share norms, practices, tips, etc.). I have developed the following scale for measuring the level of training of a given jihadist terrorist or cell of terrorists: *Strong* – the terrorists attended foreign training camps run by veteran jihadist organizations, participated in combat, or had instruction from a veteran jihadist mentor; *Intermediate* – they had some limited instruction from veteran jihadists or members of other Western jihadist cells, participated in a community of practice, or had on-the-job training (i.e., participation in other terrorist plots or activities); or *Weak* – their only sources of knowledge were instructions and manuals downloaded from the internet. In addition, I have

gathered information on the terrorists' criminal histories. A criminal background could improve a terrorist's effectiveness because he would probably have experience operating clandestinely and also access to a network for obtaining explosive materials, other weapons, or funding.

Regarding veteran jihadist connections, I also use a broad definition because distinguishing only between homegrown terrorists and al-Qaeda-directed operatives ignores the wide-variety of profiles in between these two extremes. For example, a terrorist may have been trained by al-Qaeda or may have informal social relationships with al-Qaeda members, but he could still be tactically autonomous. In addition, relationships *between* members of different homegrown cells are important. A terrorist could gain useful knowledge or information from other self-radicalized and self-trained terrorists in his own country or region. Therefore, I have defined the following categories for veteran affiliations: *Very close* – the terrorists of a given plot are members of a larger, foreign-based, jihadist organization or have direct contact with members of such; *Close* – the terrorists are connected to members of a larger, foreign-based, jihadist organization indirectly (i.e., through an intermediary) or to members of other Western-based jihadist cells directly; *Distant* – they are connected indirectly to members of other Western-based jihadist cells; or *Very distant* – they may have been inspired by the global jihadist ideology but have limited or no connections with other jihadists, cells, or organizations. Using these two sets of categories (for training and for affiliations), I examine the 26 plots in my dataset.

My dataset confirms the trend suggested by some scholars that jihadists planning to attack the American homeland are increasingly poorly-trained and unaffiliated with veteran jihadists. Of the seven plots occurring between 2001 and 2004, five had *intermediate* or *strong* training and *close* or *very close* affiliations with veteran jihadists. However, of the nine plots

between 2005 and 2007, only two had *intermediate* or *strong* training and *close* or *very close* affiliations, and of the ten plots in 2008 and 2009, only three attained a similar level of training and affiliation. Nonetheless, although terrorists appear to have become less threatening, they have consistently continued to construct serious plots. This seeming anomaly can be elucidated only by examining the relationships between training, affiliations, criminal backgrounds, and seriousness.

In this chapter, I draw preliminary conclusions based on analysis of the entire dataset (both the serious and less-serious plots) and the emergent trends regarding the relationships between training, affiliations, criminal backgrounds, and seriousness. For reasons described in the previous chapter, I will examine the bombings separately from the shootings. It should be noted that this analysis is not a statistical one and that each case does not fit perfectly into the outlined categories. Jihadist terrorism is a dynamic threat in which each case has unique features and presents unique security challenges. The categories I have provided are simply a way to organize a large volume of data, and my analysis is an attempt to elucidate interesting trends. I will examine these trends more thoroughly in the next chapter, where I conduct an in-depth analysis of each of the seven serious plots described in Chapter 2.

Table 2: Training and Affiliations of Jihadist Plots Against the US, September 2001 – December 2009

Perpetrator(s)	Date (of First Arrest)	Class	Explosives or Firearms	Criminal Record	Strength of Training	Strength of Affiliations
Richard Colvin Reid*	12/22/2001	2	Explosives	Yes	Strong	Very Close
Jose Padilla	05/08/2002	4	Explosives	Yes	Strong	Very Close
Hesham Mohamed Ali Hadayet	07/04/2002	1	Firearms	No	Weak	Distant
Iyman Faris	03/01/2003	4	Explosives	No	Intermediate	Close
Ahmed Omar Abu Ali	06/08/2003	4	Explosives	No	Strong	Very Close
Dhiren Barot*	08/03/2004	3.5	Explosives	No	Strong	Very Close

Table 2 (Continued)

Perpetrator(s)	Date (of First Arrest)	Class	Explosives or Firearms	Criminal Record	Strength of Training	Strength of Affiliations
James Elshafay and Shahawar Matin Siraj	08/27/2004	4	Explosives	Yes	Weak	Very Distant
Levar Haley Washington, Gregory Vernon Patterson, Hammad Riaz Samana, and Kevin James*	08/02/2005	3	Firearms	Yes	Weak/ Intermediate	Very Distant
Michael C. Reynolds	12/05/2005	4	Explosives	Yes	Weak	Very Distant
Syed Haris Ahmed and Ehsanul Islam Sadequee	03/23/2006	4	Explosives	No	Weak	Distant
Assem Hammoud	04/27/2006	4	Explosives	No	Intermediate	Close
Narseal Batiste and 6 others	06/22/2006	4	Explosives	Yes	Weak	Very Distant
Abdullah Ahmed Ali and 11 others*	08/10/2006	3	Explosives	Yes	Intermediate	Very Close
Derrick Shareef	12/06/2006	4	Firearms	No	Weak	Very Distant
Mohamad Ibrahim Shnewer and 5 others	05/07/2007	3	Firearms	Yes	Intermediate	Very Distant
Russell Defreitas and 3 others	06/02/2007	4	Explosives	No	Weak	Distant
Bryant Neal Vinas	11/14/2008	4	Explosives	No	Strong	Very Close
James Cromitie, David Williams, Onta Williams, and Laguerre Payen	05/20/2009	4	Explosives	Yes	Weak	Very Distant
Abdulhakim Mujahid Muhammed	06/01/2009	1	Firearms	Yes	Weak	Distant
Daniel Patrick Boyd and 7 others	07/27/2009	4	Firearms	Yes	Intermediate /Strong	Distant
Najibullah Zazi*	09/19/2009	3	Explosives	No	Strong	Close
Michael Finton	09/23/2009	4	Explosives	Yes	Weak	Very Distant
Hosam Maher Husein Smadi	09/24/2009	4	Explosives	No	Weak	Very Distant
Tarek Mehanna	10/21/2009	4	Firearms	No	Weak	Very Distant
Malik Nidal Hasan *	11/05/2009	1	Firearms	No	Weak	Distant
Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab*	12/25/2009	2	Explosives	No	Strong	Very Close

*Indicates a serious plot.

An Overview of the Bombing Plots

Of the eighteen bombing plots in my dataset, five are classified as “serious,” and the perpetrators of all five plots had received *intermediate* or *strong* training and had developed *close* or *very close* relationships with veteran jihadists. Given the discussion at the beginning of this chapter suggesting that both training and veteran affiliations improve a jihadist’s operational effectiveness, the trend seen in the data makes sense. However, five of the thirteen less serious plots also involved jihadists with *intermediate* or *strong* training and *close* or *very close* affiliations. In other words, despite their training and affiliations, half of the plots involving well-trained and -connected terrorists failed to reach an advanced stage of planning.²⁰⁰

This anomaly may be partially explained by the influence of chance or the effectiveness of the security services who disrupted these plots, but the picture becomes clearer after examining the specific types of training received by the perpetrators of the serious and the less serious bombing plots.²⁰¹ Of the five serious bombing plots, all five had at least one perpetrator attend a training camp; two had at least one perpetrator with combat experience; two had at least one perpetrator who worked with a veteran jihadist mentor; two had at least one perpetrator with on-the-job reconnaissance experience; and one had perpetrators who supplemented their training with online and written manuals, as well as related experience. Of the five less serious bombing plots whose perpetrators were well-trained and -connected, three had at least one perpetrator attend a training camp;²⁰² two had at least one perpetrator with combat experience; two had at least one perpetrator who worked with a veteran jihadist mentor; one had at least one perpetrator

²⁰⁰ None of the bombing plots reached an advanced stage of planning but then were disqualified from being a “serious” plot because the plot was not feasible or consequential.

²⁰¹ For more details on the specific training and affiliations of each plot in the dataset, see the Appendix.

²⁰² It should be noted that for one of these three, the 2003 plot by Iyman Faris, it is unclear whether Faris actually attended the training camp or just visited it.

involved in a community of practice; and three had perpetrators who supplemented their training with online manuals and research.

The spectrum of training type appears fairly similar for all of the well-trained and -connected plots no matter whether they were serious or not. However, there is one notable difference: all of the serious plots had at least one member who attended a jihadist training camp, whereas only two or three of the less serious plots did. Because the sample size is only ten cases, too much emphasis should not be placed on this observation, but it is an interesting trend showing that training camps seem to be very useful in organizing an advanced or “serious” plot.

In addition to collecting information on the type of training received by the perpetrators of all of the plots in my dataset, I also collected information on the type of affiliations they developed and, in particular, whether the perpetrators had personal contact with an explosives expert from whom they could obtain the explosives they needed for their operation or the advice and assistance they needed to manufacture the bombs. Three of the five serious plots had an affiliated explosives expert, and the perpetrators of the other two serious plots had at least received explosives-specific training and, therefore, had likely come in contact with an explosives instructor. However, only two of the five less serious plots had an affiliated explosives expert, and only one of the remaining three had a perpetrator who had explosives-specific training. Like training camp experience, having contact with an explosives expert appears to be critical to the development of a serious bombing plot.

Other relevant information I collected for each plot included the criminal backgrounds of the perpetrators. Two of the five serious bombing plots involved at least one perpetrator with a criminal background, and one of the five less serious but well-trained and -affiliated plots had a perpetrator with a criminal background. These criminal records included petty crimes, murder,

and time spent in prison. Such criminal backgrounds, particularly the time spent in jail, may have facilitated the radicalization of the soon-to-be terrorists, or may have provided the already-radicalized terrorists the opportunity to recruit accomplices. However, because only a small number of serious plots involved terrorists with criminal records, criminal background does not seem to be essential to the development of a serious plot.

On the other hand, five of the eight poorly-trained and -affiliated bombing plots involved at least one perpetrator with a criminal background. This trend suggests that criminal experience is typically used as a substitute for terrorist training rather than a supplement. Perhaps, criminals have a false sense of confidence that their experiences in the criminal world qualify them to coordinate a bombing attack. However, none of the terrorists who had a criminal background but had limited training or veteran affiliations succeeded in organizing a serious plot.²⁰³ Despite the potential benefits of a criminal background (such as experience operating clandestinely or access to weapons and potential recruits), it does not seem very useful for jihadist terrorists in the US, at least for those planning bombings. Based on this overview of the bombing plots in my dataset, it appears that terrorists who attended training camps and those who had personal contact with an explosives expert were the most likely to succeed in developing a serious bombing plot.

An Overview of the Shooting Plots and Attacks

Of the eight shooting plots and attacks between 2001 and 2009, four reached an advanced stage of planning (i.e., the terrorists had acquired the weapons necessary to carry out their attack), but only two of these have been classified as “serious” (i.e., the plot was feasible and

²⁰³ Alternatively, it is possible that many of the well-trained terrorists did in fact have criminal experience but more effectively concealed them from the police than the poorly-trained terrorists did, so there is no record of their criminal activities. However, it is beyond the scope of this study to determine the likelihood that these terrorists were uncaught criminals. Therefore, it will be assumed that if criminal activities were not mentioned by court documents or media reports, the terrorist did not have a criminal background.

consequential, in addition to being advanced). However, there is almost no variation in training or affiliations between the serious and less serious plots, or the advanced and less advanced plots. All eight shooting plots had perpetrators with *distant* or *very distant* connections to veteran jihadists. In other words, the perpetrators were either indirectly linked to other Western-based cells or completely disconnected from other jihadists, cells, or organizations. In fact, for many of the plots, the contact with other jihadists was largely alleged, and only one plot, the 2009 shooting by Malik Nidal Hasan, had clear contact with a Western-based jihadist, Anwar al-Awlaki, an American-born extremist cleric who is known to be affiliated with al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).

Furthermore, seven of the eight shooting plots had perpetrators with *intermediate* or *weak* training, and the one plot whose perpetrators had *intermediate/strong* training was a non-serious plot. The perpetrators of the two serious shooting plots received either limited firearms and physical training within a community of practice or military training from the US Army. Three of the remaining (non-serious) plots had perpetrators who received training in communities of practice (i.e., firearms or physical training, primarily at shooting ranges and paintball facilities); one had perpetrators who had attended training camps and who had combat experience; and three of the plots had perpetrators for whom the court documents and media reports recorded no training. It is apparent that neither the type nor the amount of terrorist-related training received by the perpetrators of a shooting plot influenced the effectiveness of the plot.

However, the two serious plots were distinguished from the other (non-serious) plots by the background experience of their perpetrators. The perpetrator of one of the serious plots, the 2009 shooting by Malik Nidal Hasan, had experience as an officer in the US military, so not only was he familiar with firearms and their use but he was also familiar with his target, the US Army

base on which he was stationed. The perpetrators of the other serious plot, the foiled 2005 shooting by Levar Washington and his group, had extensive experience as criminals, particularly in armed robbery, so they were accustomed to using firearms and plotting clandestine operations.

In fact, like Washington and his accomplices, the perpetrators of four of the eight shooting plots had criminal backgrounds. Of these four plots, three reached an advanced stage of planning or execution. However, only one of these three was a “serious” plot; the other two were disqualified because they were not sufficiently consequential. This trend suggests that criminal background positively affects the ability of a shooting plot to reach an advanced stage, but it does not necessarily affect the consequentiality of the planned attack. Furthermore, it appears that criminal background is a more influential factor in determining the effectiveness of a shooting plot than it is for a bombing plot, in which an individual’s criminal experience seems to have little impact on his operational effectiveness as a terrorist.

Explaining the Continued Emergence of Serious Plots

I want to return to the question posed at the beginning of this chapter: Why do serious jihadist plots against the American homeland continue to arise even though jihadist terrorism has become an increasingly homegrown phenomenon? As illustrated in this chapter, this question can best be answered by examining the bombing and shooting plots separately. Regarding the bombing plots, although the perpetrators are increasingly poorly-trained and unaffiliated, some determined, wannabe bombers still manage to travel abroad and attend jihadist training camps. These individuals (and particularly the ones affiliated with explosives experts) are able to organize plots that, if executed according to plan, would have serious repercussions for the security of the US homeland. On the other hand, the untrained and unaffiliated bombers do not

appear to be particularly threatening, and even the ones who have had some training (such as with a mentor or in a community of practice) but have not attended a training camp have not traditionally been successful at coordinating serious plots.

As for the shootings, it is more difficult to find factors that distinguish the serious plots from the less-serious ones, than it is for the bombing plots. However, it seems that the perpetrators' background experiences (in particular criminal and military experiences) are more valuable for constructing advanced shooting plots than are their terrorist training and affiliations. Therefore, serious shooting plots continue to arise, despite the lack of terrorist-specific training and affiliations, because would-be shooters have criminal or military histories that give them the experience necessary to plan their operations. Not all of these operations can be considered "serious," largely because shootings tend to be less consequential than bombings since they cause fewer casualties. However, sometimes the shooters pick a particularly iconic target or manage to cause a surprisingly large number of casualties, and the plot becomes a serious one.

The explanation for the continued appearance of serious jihadist plots against the US varies depending on whether the plot involved explosives or firearms. However, for both types of plots, the general idea is the same: despite the trend towards poorly-trained, homegrown terrorism, some jihadists were simply able to acquire the skills necessary to construct a feasible and consequential plot and to bring it to an advanced stage of planning. For the bombing plots, these skills were most effectively acquired through jihadist training camps and contact with explosives experts, and for the shooting plots, they were best acquired through relevant personal experiences, such as criminal activities or military service. In the next chapter, I will examine the training, affiliations, and criminal/military backgrounds of the seven "serious" jihadist plots in order to confirm the preliminary conclusions presented in this chapter.

Chapter 4

The Influence of Jihadist Training and Veteran Affiliations: A Case-Study Analysis of Serious Plots

In a 2009 statement on the US strategy in Afghanistan and Pakistan, President Barack Obama described the border region between the two countries as “the most dangerous place in the world” for the American people.²⁰⁴ In particular, the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) in northwestern Pakistan have become particularly problematic for US national security. Al-Qaeda has established a safe haven in this mountainous and loosely governed region and has begun to reconstruct simpler versions of the training camps that it lost in the US invasion of Afghanistan. Western recruits have been increasingly drawn to the region to attend these training camps, and according to Western counterterrorism officials, approximately 100 to 150 Westerners journeyed to the region for paramilitary training in 2009.²⁰⁵

One such Westerner, an American by the name of Bryant Neal Vinas, traveled to Waziristan, an area within the FATA, in 2008. His statements to the FBI and several Belgian prosecutors have provided a window into the al-Qaeda training camp experience. According to

²⁰⁴ “Remarks of President Barack Obama: A New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan” (White House Office of the Press Secretary, March 27, 2009).

²⁰⁵ Paul Cruickshank, “The Militant Pipeline: Between the Afghanistan-Pakistan Border Region and the West” (New America Foundation, February 2010), <http://counterterrorism.newamerica.net/sites/newamerica.net/files/policydocs/cruickshank.pdf>.

Vinas, he attended a series of three courses with approximately ten to twenty students in each.²⁰⁶ The first course was an introduction to AK-47s, machine guns, and pistols; the second was a fifteen-day course in explosives, in which he learned to manufacture suicide belts and became comfortable seeing, smelling, and touching various explosives; and the third was an introduction to rocket-propelled grenades.²⁰⁷ In addition, Vinas participated in a class on assassination and silencers.²⁰⁸ Based on interrogations by prosecuting authorities of a Belgian-French group of jihadists, who Vinas befriended during his training in Waziristan, Vinas' courses were likely taught inside small mountain shacks.²⁰⁹ Despite the humble accommodations, the result was a worryingly well-trained jihadist with plans to return to New York and bomb the Long Island Rail Road.

Several years earlier, a group of wannabe jihadists from New York, known as the Lackawanna Six, provided similar insider knowledge of the training camp world. However, their experience at al-Qaeda's al-Farooq camp in Afghanistan in 2001 differed somewhat from the experience of Vinas and his Belgian-French colleagues in Waziristan. Like Vinas, the Lackawanna Six received training on firearms (including Kalashnikovs, handguns, and long-range rifles) and explosives (including C-4, TNT, and others), but unlike Vinas, the Six attended a camp that hosted approximately 200 trainees at any given time.²¹⁰ Although the training camp described by Vinas differed structurally from al-Farooq, the purpose was the same: to provide

²⁰⁶ Michael Powell, "U.S. Recruit Reveals How Qaeda Trains Foreigners," *The New York Times*, July 23, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/24/nyregion/24terror.html>.

²⁰⁷ Powell, "U.S. Recruit Reveals How Qaeda Trains Foreigners." See also, Cruickshank, "The Militant Pipeline," p. 19.

²⁰⁸ Powell, "U.S. Recruit Reveals How Qaeda Trains Foreigners."

²⁰⁹ Cruickshank, "The Militant Pipeline," p. 19.

²¹⁰ "Government's Proffer of Evidence as to All of the Defendants," October 8, 2002, <http://news.findlaw.com/hdocs/docs/terrorism/usgoba10802gprof.pdf>; and "United States of America vs. Yahya Goba, Sahim Alwan, Shafal Mosed, Yasein Taher, Faysal Galab; Criminal Complaint" (District Court of the United States, For the Western District of New York, September 13, 2002), <http://www.news.findlaw.com/hdocs/docs/terrorism/usgoba091302cmp.pdf>.

new al-Qaeda recruits with hands-on training and experience. For jihadists who hope to effectively execute an operation, this practical knowledge is a necessary addition to the technical knowledge provided in instruction manuals and bomb-making recipes. As one counter-terrorism intelligence analyst with the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office explains, “If you’re going to carry out an attack, you need a certain amount of training. You need someone who can help you translate the recipe into action.”²¹¹

As explained in the previous chapter, it is the ability of Western recruits to travel to these training camps that explains, in large part, the continued emergence of “serious” bombing plots against the US homeland since 9/11. All five of the “serious” bombing plots in the dataset of this study involved at least one perpetrator who had attended a training camp, where he received hands-on training and, in most cases, established contact with an explosives expert. The training camps the perpetrators attended include not only those run by al-Qaeda but also ones under the direction of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), and, potentially, other veteran jihadist groups in the region.²¹² This chapter will examine how the training and affiliations of the bombing plot perpetrators helped them to develop “serious” plots.

After analyzing the bombing plots, I will then turn to the serious shootings, whose continued emergence cannot be explained by Western terrorists’ access to training camps and explosives experts. Rather, serious shooting plots and attacks continue to appear in the US due to the radicalization of individuals with relevant background experience, particularly in the form of

²¹¹ Michael Kenney interview with counter-terrorism analyst, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, United Kingdom, London, July 24, 2007. Quoted in Michael Kenney, “Organizational Learning and Islamic Militancy” (NCJRS, May 2009).

²¹² The perpetrator of the most recent bombing plot, a failed attempt to detonate a car bomb in New York City’s Times Square on 1 May 2010, is suspected of receiving training from the Pakistani Taliban. (Charlie Savage, “Holder Backs a Miranda Limit for Terror Suspects,” *The New York Times*, May 9, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/10/us/politics/10holder.html>.) This plot has not been included in the dataset of this study because not enough evidence and information is available to the public to construct an accurate picture of the perpetrator’s training, affiliations, and bomb-making preparations.

criminal activity and, in one case, military service. Although there have been a number of studies on prison radicalization, few studies have explored the transition from criminal to terrorist (i.e., the use of criminal experience as preparation for terrorist operations). However, as Kenney notes, criminals may “draw on their illicit expertise and criminal associations to prepare for politically motivated terrorist attacks.”²¹³ As stated in the previous chapter, criminal experience generally helps the would-be shooters achieve an advanced stage of planning, but it does not necessarily guarantee that their attacks will be considered a “serious” ones. In this chapter, I will examine the two “serious” shooting plots between 2001 and 2009 and illustrate how the perpetrators’ criminal or military backgrounds facilitated their coordination of serious shooting plots.

Serious Bombing Plots, Training Camps, and Veteran Affiliations

Richard Reid: The Shoe Bomber Plot (December 2001)

In the mid-1990s, Richard Reid began attending the Brixton Mosque in South London after recently converting to Islam in prison.²¹⁴ It was at Brixton that Reid came into contact with Zacarias Moussaoui, a 9/11 operative who was arrested the month before the attacks. Moussaoui held extremist views that were not accepted at the more moderate Brixton Mosque, and so he and Reid began attending the radical Finsbury Park Mosque in the late 1990s, where Reid came under the influence of radical imams, such as Abu Qatada and Abu Hamza.²¹⁵ Authorities claim

²¹³ Kenney, “Organizational Learning and Islamic Militancy.”

²¹⁴ “Mosque leader warns over extremist converts,” *guardian.co.uk*, December 26, 2001, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2001/dec/26/september11.uk>.

²¹⁵ John Meyer, Sebastian Rotella, and Majorie Miller, “Shoe-bomb suspect linked to al Qaeda,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 27, 2001, <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2001/12/27/MN117153.DTL>. See also, T.R. Reid and Keith B. Richburg, “Shoe Bomb Suspect's Journey Into Al Qaeda; Search Continues for Reid's Mysterious Handlers,” *Washington Post*, March 31, 2002, Final edition, sec. A.

that members of the Finsbury Mosque arranged for him to travel to Pakistan for training classes in 1999.²¹⁶

During Reid's trip overseas, he attended al-Qaeda training camps in Afghanistan, first the Khalden camp, where he learned the basics of explosives, and then the Daruntag camp, where he trained under Abu Khabab al-Masri, al-Qaeda's master bomb maker and chemical weapons expert.²¹⁷ French court documents also suggest that Reid may have participated in combat in support of the Taliban during this time.²¹⁸ While in Afghanistan, Reid came under the control of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed (KSM), an important al-Qaeda member and the architect of the 9/11 plot.²¹⁹ By his own admission, it was KSM who masterminded the shoe bomb plot, which he had originally envisioned as part of the 9/11 plot.²²⁰

The plot came together under KSM's direction, and Reid's various al-Qaeda contacts facilitated the attack preparations. Between 2000 and 2001, Ammar al-Baluchi, a Pakistan-based al-Qaeda operative who transferred money to US-based 9/11 operatives and acted as a travel facilitator for those trying to enter the US, acted as the communications intermediary between Reid and another operative, Sajid Badat, who was assigned to detonate a shoe bomb on another flight on the same day as Reid but backed out of the plot a few days before execution.²²¹

²¹⁶ Reid and Richburg, "Shoe Bomb Suspect's Journey Into Al Qaeda."

²¹⁷ Mark Honigsbaum and Vikram Dodd, "From Gloucester to Afghanistan: the making of a shoe bomber," *Guardian*, March 5, 2005; and Habibullah Khan and Brian Ross, "U.S. Strike Killed Al Qaeda Bomb Maker," *ABC News*, January 18, 2006, <http://abcnews.go.com/WNT/Investigation/story?id=1517986>.

²¹⁸ Republic of France v. Rama, Magistrates' Court of Paris, File number 0413839059, Judgment, Filed June 16, 2005, in "KSM's Transatlantic Shoe Bomb Plot" (The NEFA Foundation, September 2007), <http://nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/shoebombplot.pdf>.

²¹⁹ Maria Ressa, "Sources: Reid is al Qaeda operative," *CNN*, December 6, 2003, <http://www.cnn.com/2003/WORLD/asiapcf/southeast/01/30/reid.alqaeda/>.

²²⁰ "Unclassified Verbatim Transcript of Combatant Status Review Tribunal Hearing for ISN 10024" (US Department of Defense, March 10, 2007), http://www.defense.gov/news/transcript_isn10024.pdf; and *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Consortium on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States*, 1st ed., National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, (W.W. Norton & Company, 2004), p. 156.

²²¹ "Biographies of High Value Terrorist Detainees Transferred to the US Naval Base at Guantanamo Bay" (Office of the Director of National Intelligence, September 6, 2006), <http://www.dni.gov/announcements/content/DetaineeBiographies.pdf>; and "United States of America v. Zacarias

Furthermore, French court documents suggest that Reid may have had technical and financial support from within France as well, probably from Ghulam Rama, a suspected affiliate of the Pakistani terrorist group Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LeT).²²²

While Reid's support base facilitated the logistics of the attack, his training engendered quality tradecraft that prevented security services from detecting the plot. Reid became adept at conducting reconnaissance and evading police surveillance. In order to avoid suspicions arising from his travels to Pakistan and Afghanistan, Reid went to the British Embassy in Brussels claiming to have lost his passport and applied for a new one.²²³ On another occasion, he destroyed his passport by washing it and then went to the British Embassy in Amsterdam to obtain a replacement.²²⁴ In notes that Reid wrote during a scouting mission through the Netherlands, Israel, Egypt, Turkey and Pakistan, he mentions that "washing the passport is a practical way of ridding the passport of any Pakistani visas."²²⁵ In addition to altering his passport, Reid also took other actions to cover his tracks. During his stay in Amsterdam, Reid put empty alcohol bottles in his room and cigarette butts in his ashtray to hide his Islamic fundamentalism.²²⁶ Furthermore, Reid succeeded in passing through airport security in Paris, even after security personnel detained him for additional screening.²²⁷

Moussaoui, Stipulation Regarding Richard Reid" (The United States District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia, Alexandria Division),

http://nefaoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/U.S._v_Moussaoui_StipReRichardReid.pdf.

²²² Republic of France v. Rama, Magistrates' Court of Paris, in "KSM's Transatlantic Shoe Bomb Plot" (The NEFA Foundation); and John Tagliabue, "World Briefing: Europe: France: Prison For Man Linked To 'Shoe Bomber'," *The New York Times*, June 17, 2005,

<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=940CE0DD143BF934A25755C0A9639C8B63>.

²²³ "Press Release: British National Indicted for Conspiring with 'Shoe Bomber' Richard Reid" (US Department of Justice, October 4, 2004), http://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/2004/October/04_crm_673.htm.

²²⁴ Alan Cullison and Andrew Higgins, "Account of Spy Trip on Kabul PC Matches Travels of Richard Reid," *The Wall Street Journal*, January 16, 2002.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ "United States of America vs. Richard Colvin Reid; Government's Sentencing Memorandum" (United States District Court, District of Massachusetts, January 17, 2003),

<http://news.findlaw.com/hdocs/docs/reid/usreid11703sentm.pdf>.

Finally, his affiliations and training provided him access to the explosives needed to carry out the attack. It is unclear whether Reid assembled the explosive devices himself or whether he received them pre-made from an al-Qaeda contact. According to a French court document Reid claimed that he found bomb-making instructions on the internet, bought the supplies in Amsterdam, assembled the explosive devices himself, and had a professional stitch the shoes together.²²⁸ However, French authorities do not believe that Reid had the technical capabilities to assemble the devices himself.²²⁹ Furthermore, Reid's co-conspirator Badat confessed that his explosive shoes, which were almost identical in chemical composition to Reid's, were given to him while he was in Afghanistan.²³⁰ Therefore, it is plausible that Reid received the explosives from an al-Qaeda contact in Afghanistan at the same time as Badat did. Whether Reid assembled the shoe bombs himself or received them ready-made, it is clear that either his explosives training or his al-Qaeda affiliations were essential to obtaining an effective device.

Reid's training at the camps in Afghanistan and his al-Qaeda affiliations, particularly his contact with the explosives expert al-Masri, were key to the near success of this plot. His initial contacts with Muslim extremists in London gave him access to training in Afghanistan and Pakistan. During his time abroad, Reid became further embedded in the al-Qaeda network, which facilitated the initiation and preparation of the shoe bombing plot. In addition, Reid's training engendered good tradecraft that made him an effective clandestine operative and provided him with an understanding of explosives that may have allowed him to assemble a device or at least understand how to use a device given to him through his contacts. This plot provides a clear

²²⁸ Republic of France v. Rama, Magistrates' Court of Paris, in "KSM's Transatlantic Shoe Bomb Plot" (The NEFA Foundation).

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Jenny Booth, "Gloucester shoe bomber jailed for 13 years," *Times Online*, April 22, 2005, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article384323.ece>.

example of how strong training (in jihadist camps) and close veteran connections (including with an explosives expert) can produce a serious plot.

Dhiren Barot: Financial Institutions Plot (August 2004)

Like Reid, Barot received training in jihadist camps; however, Barot's training took him not only to camps in Afghanistan but also in Kashmir, Pakistan, Malaysia, and the Philippines.²³¹ His training camp tour began in Pakistan in 1995.²³² From Pakistan, he traveled to a mountainous region in Kashmir, where, according to his own account, he participated in combat against the "Hindu aggressors."²³³ In 1998, he served as a lead instructor at a camp in Afghanistan where recruits received weapons and paramilitary training,²³⁴ and by October 1999, Barot was attending a JI training camp in the Philippines.²³⁵ In addition, *The 9/11 Commission Report* claims that KSM was a close associate of Barot and sent him to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia "to learn about the jihad in Southeast Asia from Hambali [the former leader of JI]."²³⁶ During his time in the training camps, Barot took detailed notes, which the police later found and which referred to Kalashnikovs and AK-47s, grenades, various chemicals, poisons, a bomb of TNT and sulfuric acid, Molotov cocktails, and napalm bombs.²³⁷ They also described the preparation of nitro-

²³¹ Tucker Reals, "British Terror Plotter Gets Life In Prison," *CBS News*, November 7, 2006, <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2006/11/07/world/main2158113.shtml>.

²³² "Muslim convert who plotted terror," *BBC News*, November 7, 2006, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/6121084.stm.

²³³ Esa al-Hindi, *The Army of Madinah in Kashmir*, Maktabah Al Ansaar Publications, Birmingham, UK, 1999, in "The East Coast Buildings Plot" (The NEFA Foundation, October 2007), http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/East_Coast_Buildings_Plot.pdf.

²³⁴ "United States of America v. Dhiren Barot, Indictment" (United States District Court, Southern District of New York, April 2005), http://www.nefafoundation.org/documents-legal-A_M.html#barot.

²³⁵ "The Traveling Terrorist," *The Telegraph*, November 7, 2006 in "The East Cost Buildings Plot" (The NEFA Foundation).

²³⁶ *The 9/11 Commission Report*, p. 150. See also, Reals, "British Terror Plotter Gets Life In Prison."

²³⁷ Muslim convert who plotted terror," *BBC News*.

glycerin, a design for a phosphorous bomb, and the effects and manufacture of poisons, including cyanide, ricin, and botulinum toxin.²³⁸

After Barot completed his training, KSM sent him to the US to case potential economic targets in New York City.²³⁹ Like the Shoe Bomber plot, the Financial Institutions plot was initiated by the central al-Qaeda leadership, and like Richard Reid, Barot returned to the West armed with counter-surveillance techniques. Barot rarely stayed in one location for more than one night; he generally avoided using cell phones; and he drove a variety of different vehicles and made sudden maneuvers while driving to make tailing difficult.²⁴⁰ Like Reid, Barot had a habit of “losing” his passport.²⁴¹ In addition, he was able to conduct extensive reconnaissance on his targets without arousing suspicion,²⁴² and he was reasonably adept at concealing his reconnaissance materials. For example, his video footage from New York was spliced between two parts of a copy of the movie *Die Hard*.²⁴³ According to Deputy Assistant Commissioner Peter Clarke, Head of the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) Counter Terrorism Command and National Coordinator of Terrorism Investigations, Barot and his associates “were skilled in anti-surveillance techniques, the use of coded messages and arranging secret meetings.”²⁴⁴ He added, “Indeed, on one occasion, [Junade] Feroze and [Abdul Aziz] Jalil [two of Barot’s accomplices]

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ *The 9/11 Commission Report*, p. 150. In 2007, KSM claimed to be “responsible for surveying and financing for the destruction of the New York Stock Exchange and other financial targets after 9/11.” (“Unclassified Verbatim Transcript of Combatant Status Review Tribunal Hearing for ISN 10024” (US Department of Defense).)

²⁴⁰ “Police terror probe of vast scale,” *BBC News*, November 7, 2006, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/6125338.stm.

²⁴¹ “Muslim convert who plotted terror,” *BBC News*.

²⁴² See Chapter 2 for a more detailed description of the extent of Barot’s reconnaissance.

²⁴³ “Key questions from the Barot case,” *BBC News*, November 7, 2006,

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/6126040.stm.

²⁴⁴ “Operation Rhyme Terror Convictions” (Metropolitan Police Service Press Release, June 15, 2007), http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/Barot/MPS_Op_Rhyme_Convictions.pdf.

traveled literally hundreds of miles to use an internet café before returning to London to continue with their planning.”²⁴⁵

In addition to his tradecraft skills, Barot had access to another valuable asset: a network of associates who had the materials and expertise he needed to logistically support his plot. Barot worked with seven others to advance his plot, and each co-conspirator had a skill or background experience that was useful to Barot. For example, one accomplice, Zia Ul-Haq, had university training in architecture, so he was able to help Barot gain access to specialist libraries and advise him on how to cause the structural collapse of his target buildings.²⁴⁶ Another co-conspirator, Omar Abdur Rehman, had studied information design and had been tasked with disabling fire and security systems in the buildings.²⁴⁷ The police found plans of a security system and diagrams of the positions of security guards at his home.²⁴⁸ Yet another, Junade Feroze, owned a garage, where Barot could obtain cars and gas canisters (items that could be used to make car bombs).²⁴⁹

At least one of the accomplices, Abdul Aziz Jalil, who helped Barot do research for the plot, is suspected of attending a training camp in Pakistan.²⁵⁰ However, it is unlikely that any of the others had jihadist training; they were useful to Barot simply because of their skills or background. This support network differs from Reid’s network, which was composed solely of al-Qaeda operatives. Barot’s network included other homegrown jihadists as well as al-Qaeda contacts. Media reports have tied him to Mohammed Neem Noor Khan, an al-Qaeda

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ “Dhiren Barot’s co-conspirators,” *BBC News*, June 15, 2007, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/6756685.stm; and Duncan Gardham, “Profiles: The Harrow gang,” *Telegraph.co.uk*, June 15, 2007, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1554566/Profiles-The-Harrow-gang.html>.

²⁴⁷ “Dhiren Barot’s co-conspirators,” *BBC News*.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Gardham, “Profiles: The Harrow gang.”

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

communications specialist.²⁵¹ In addition, Barot traveled to visit al-Qaeda leaders as recently as late 2004 to present his plans and to get approval and resources.²⁵²

As in Richard Reid's case, it seems that Barot's training overseas provided him with sufficient tradecraft skills to bring his plot to an advanced stage, and his al-Qaeda affiliations may have facilitated the attack preparations. However, unlike Reid, Barot seems to have had a wider network of affiliations. His initial contacts in al-Qaeda helped him connect with members and leaders of other veteran jihadist groups, like JI, but Barot also relied heavily on the skills of homegrown and generally untrained jihadists. Barot's plot certainly was not as advanced as Reid's. Barot was either less skillful or less lucky than Reid because the investigation that led to Barot's arrest began when a laptop with his plans on it was seized in a raid in Pakistan a couple of months before the arrest.²⁵³ In addition, because Barot did not reach the point of acquiring or assembling explosives, it is unclear how useful his explosives training and his access to materials were. However, given his thoroughness and competence in surveillance and tradecraft, it seems likely that he would be similarly adept with explosives.

Abdullah Ahmed Ali: The Liquid Explosives Plot (August 2006)

Abdullah Ahmed Ali and his accomplices represent a new wave of al-Qaeda-trained terrorists. These Western jihadists, like others who traveled abroad for training after 2001, received instruction not in the traditional al-Qaeda camps in Afghanistan but in the newly established camps in the FATA of northwest Pakistan, where al-Qaeda had established a safe haven since the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. At least seven of the twelve convicted plotters traveled to Pakistan sometime between 2004 and 2006, and of these seven, at least two

²⁵¹ Ron Moreau, Zahid Hussain and Sami Yousafzai, "Bin Laden's Back Channel," *Newsweek*, August 16, 2006 in "The East Coast Buildings Plot" (The NEFA Foundation).

²⁵² "Muslim convert who plotted terror," *BBC News*.

²⁵³ "Police terror probe of vast scale," *BBC News*.

received training in the FATA: ringleader Ali and his accomplice Assad Ali Sarwar.²⁵⁴

According to US counterterrorism officials, the plotters who trained in the FATA received bomb-making instruction under Abu Ubaidah al-Masri, a senior al-Qaeda operational planner.²⁵⁵

British intelligence further claimed that the plotters received instruction specifically on preparing liquid explosives from hydrogen peroxide and a highly volatile explosive, hexamethylene triperoxide diamine (HMTD), which they attempted to later replicate in their “bomb factory” in London.²⁵⁶

It was al-Masri who masterminded the plot, including the design of injecting the liquid explosives into soft drink bottles with false bottoms.²⁵⁷ Even after Ali and Sarwar left Pakistan to begin attack preparations in Britain, al-Masri remained involved in the details of the plot through Rashid Rauf, a British al-Qaeda operative of Pakistani origin who acted as a liaison.²⁵⁸ Rauf had traveled to Pakistan in early 2002 to take part in the jihad, and by May 2005, he had made contact with the majority of the top al-Qaeda commanders.²⁵⁹ The Pakistani Interior Minister at the time referred to Rauf as a “key Al Qaeda operative.”²⁶⁰ Rauf had met Ali and Sarwar during their time in Pakistan, and he was in almost constant contact with them up until the disruption of

²⁵⁴ Cruickshank, “The Militant Pipeline”; and “Inside the U.K. Terror Plot,” *ABC News*, August 10, 2010, http://blogs.abcnews.com/theblotter/2006/08/inside_the_uk_t.html. See also, Ian Cobain and Richard Norton Taylor, “Rashid Rauf: the al-Qaida suspect caught, tortured and lost,” *guardian.co.uk*, September 8, 2009, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2009/sep/08/rashid-rauf-terrorism-torture-pakistan>.

²⁵⁵ Cruickshank, “The Militant Pipeline.” See also, Sebastian Rotella, “Alleged Al-Qaeda chief dead, officials say,” *The Los Angeles Times*, April 10, 2008.

²⁵⁶ Cruickshank, “The Militant Pipeline.”

²⁵⁷ Stephen Fidler, “Three Guilty in U.K. Jet Bomb Plot,” *The Wall Street Journal*, September 8, 2009, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB125233352854190305.html>; and Sebastian Rotella, “Dangerous, endangered: A look inside Al Qaeda,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 2, 2008, <http://articles.latimes.com/2008/apr/02/world/fg-ubaida2>.

²⁵⁸ Alan Cowell, Dexter Filkins, and Mark Mazzetti, “Suspect Held in Pakistan Is Said to Have Ties to Qaeda,” *The New York Times*, August 12, 2006, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/12/world/europe/12plot.html>.

²⁵⁹ Carol Grisanti and Robert Windrem, “U.K. terror plot suspect forced to talk,” *NBC News*, August 17, 2006, <http://www.tripso.com/forum/showthread.php?t=8308>.

²⁶⁰ Cowell et al., “Suspect Held in Pakistan Is Said to Have Ties to Qaeda.”

the plot by the police.²⁶¹ This detail-level control distinguishes this plot from Barot's, which seemed more independent of the central al-Qaeda leadership.

Despite this close supervision by al-Qaeda (or perhaps because of it), security services in Britain, Pakistan, and the US were able to detect and track the plot for months before finally arresting the operatives. The British police were first tipped off over a year earlier, following the 7/7 attacks, by a member of the Muslim community who was concerned about an acquaintance.²⁶² Over the following year, security services conducted an extensive multinational operation to track and capture the terrorists.

The early detection of the plot may have been a result of the close contact between the plotters and al-Qaeda in Pakistan, or the extensive logistical support network for the plot that may have involved as many as fifty individuals in three separate cells.²⁶³ However, it is also possible that the plotters simply did not have the same caliber tradecraft as did Richard Reid and Dhiren Barot, at least with respect to counter-surveillance techniques. While it seems that the training camps in the FATA have grown more sophisticated in recent years, their quality, particularly in their early years of 2004-2006, was far below that of the large formal camps in Afghanistan in the 1990s.²⁶⁴ Therefore, although Paul Cruickshank suggests that "as recently as 2008, al-Qaeda was able to offer recruits the sort of bomb-making training that would be useful for attacks in the West,"²⁶⁵ it is unclear that the two liquid explosives plotters, Ali and Sarwar, received top-notch training during their time in the FATA.

²⁶¹ Cobain and Taylor, "Rashid Rauf"; and Cruickshank, "The Militant Pipeline."

²⁶² Craig Whitlock and Dafna Linzor, "Tip Followed '05 Attacks on London Transit," *The Washington Post*, August 11, 2006, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/08/10/AR2006081001654.html>.

²⁶³ Whitlock and Linzor, "Tip Followed '05 Attacks on London Transit."

²⁶⁴ Marc Sageman, *Confronting al-Qaeda: Understanding the Threat in Afghanistan and Beyond*, 2009, <http://www.fpri.org/transcripts/20091007.Sageman.ConfrontingalQaeda.pdf>, p. 10.

²⁶⁵ Cruickshank, "The Militant Pipeline," p. 28.

The seriousness of the Liquid Explosives plot was certainly a product of the training and affiliations its main perpetrators acquired during their time in Pakistan. Al-Qaeda leaders trained at least two of the operatives, providing them with the specific explosives instruction needed for the plot, and initiated and directed the plot throughout the length of its preparation. However, although the operatives received the necessary explosives training, they may not have been given sufficient instruction in tradecraft. In addition, the plotters' contacts with al-Qaeda operatives may have sown the seeds of the plot's destruction by providing the police with ample leads and evidence.

Najibullah Zazi: The Denver Plot (September 2009)

Like Abdullah Ahmed Ali and his accomplices, Najibullah Zazi, Zarein Ahmedzay, and Adis Medunjanin received training in the al-Qaeda camps in the FATA.²⁶⁶ However, when the three Denver plotters traveled to Pakistan in August 2008, they were not searching for al-Qaeda but rather the Taliban.²⁶⁷ They intended to join the Taliban and travel to Afghanistan, where they would wage jihad against the US and its allied forces, but shortly after their arrival in Peshawar, they were recruited by al-Qaeda and transported to the Waziristan region of the FATA for training on a variety of weapons.²⁶⁸ When they arrived at the al-Qaeda compound, Zazi, Ahmedzay, and Medunjanin met Saleh al-Somali, al-Qaeda's head of external operations, and

²⁶⁶ "United States of America v. Najibullah Zazi; Criminal Complaint" (United States District Court for the District of Colorado, September 19, 2009), http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/US_v_NajibullahZazi_complaint.pdf. See also, "Press Release: Three Arrested in Ongoing Terror Investigation" (Department of Justice, September 20, 2009), http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/US_v_NajibullahZazi_dojprarrest.pdf; and A. G. Sulzberger, "Two More Men Charged in Plot to Bomb Subways," *The New York Times*, February 25, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/26/nyregion/26terror.html>.

²⁶⁷ "Press Release: Najibullah Zazi Pleads Guilty to Conspiracy to Use Explosives Against Persons or Property in U.S., Conspiracy to Murder Abroad and Providing Material Support to Al-Qaeda" (Department of Justice, Office of Public Affairs, February 22, 2010), http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/US_v_NajibullahZazi_dojprguilty.pdf.

²⁶⁸ "Press Release: Najibullah Zazi Pleads Guilty" (Department of Justice).

Rashid Rauf, the al-Qaeda operative who was also involved in the Liquid Explosives plot.²⁶⁹

According to Ahmedzay, “We told these two individuals that we wanted to wage jihad in Afghanistan, but they said that we would be more useful to them and to the jihad if we returned to New York and conducted operations there.”²⁷⁰ After talking it over, the three decided to heed the al-Qaeda leaders’ advice and return to the US to conduct a suicide mission against the New York subway system.

Following basic training, Ahmedzay and Medunjanin returned to the US in October 2008, but Zazi went on to receive additional training on constructing the explosives needed for the operation.²⁷¹ The FBI later discovered nine pages of handwritten notes that Zazi had taken during his explosives training and that contained formulations and instructions for the manufacture and handling of explosives.²⁷² Zazi returned to the US in January 2009 and moved to Denver, where he began acquiring the ingredients designated in his notes for the fabrication of the explosive triacetone triperoxide (TATP).²⁷³

It is unclear how Zazi and his co-conspirators made their initial contact with al-Qaeda. Typically, Western-based jihadist wannabes who travel to the Middle East in hopes of joining the jihad find it difficult to befriend veteran jihadists, who tend to be wary of outsiders for fear of infiltration.²⁷⁴ Without having someone to vouch for them, many Westerners are turned away from training camps and terrorist groups. For example, in November 2002, Tarek Mehanna, an Egyptian-American who was arrested in October 2009 for planning a shooting at a shopping

²⁶⁹ William K. Rashbaum and Karen Zraick, “Government Says Al Qaeda Told New Yorkers to Commit Suicide Bombings,” *The New York Times*, April 24, 2010, LexisNexis Academic.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁷¹ William K. Rashbaum, “Queens Man Is Accused Of Getting Qaeda Training,” *The New York Times*, January 10, 2010, LexisNexis Academic; and, “Press Release: Najibullah Zazi Pleads Guilty” (Department of Justice).

²⁷² “United States of America v. Najibullah Zazi; Criminal Complaint” (United States District Court for the District of Colorado).

²⁷³ “Press Release: Najibullah Zazi Pleads” (Department of Justice).

²⁷⁴ Sami Yousafzai and Ron Moreau, “How Jihadist Recruiters Check for Spies,” *Newsweek*, May 7, 2010, <http://blog.newsweek.com/blogs/declassified/archive/2010/05/07/how-jihadist-recruiters-check-for-spies.aspx>.

center, traveled to Pakistan to attend a jihadist training camp.²⁷⁵ He found a Taliban camp as well as an LeT camp, but he was rejected from the first for being too inexperienced and from the second for not being Pakistani.²⁷⁶ It is likely that Zazi and his companions had a contact who recommended them to the al-Qaeda leaders, and as their trials unfold, details will continue to emerge and fill in the gaps.

Nonetheless, it is clear that the Denver plotters' relationships with the al-Qaeda leaders led to the development of the plot and the training necessary to carry it out, without which the plotters' may have returned to the US empty-handed and cobbled together an unsophisticated plot, like that envisioned by Mehanna. Furthermore, the story of the Denver plotters' experiences in Pakistan highlights an increasingly pressing issue: radicalized Westerners travel to fight the jihad in Afghanistan or Iraq but are instead trained and turned back to attack their home countries. The most famous example of this phenomenon is the London train bombers, whose attack on July 7, 2005 killed more than fifty people and injured another 700. The perpetrators traveled to Pakistan in the spring of 2003 with the intention of fighting the jihad in Afghanistan, but their al-Qaeda handler suggested they turn their efforts to planning an attack in Britain instead, since al-Qaeda already "had enough people" in Afghanistan.²⁷⁷ According to Cruickshank, it seems that "very few made the journey [to Pakistan since 9/11] expressly to get terrorist training to launch attacks in their home countries."²⁷⁸ However, terrorist groups tend to find Western recruits to be more useful in their home countries, where they have an understanding of the country and its culture and they blend in sufficiently to avoid suspicions,

²⁷⁵ Aled Thomas, "Tarek Mehanna charged with plot on US troops and shoppers," *Times Online*, October 21, 2009, http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/us_and_americas/article6884252.ece; and, Mark Clayton, "How FBI traced Tarek Mehanna in his quest to become a jihadi," *Christian Science Monitor*, October 22, 2009, <http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Justice/2009/1022/p02s10-usju.html>.

²⁷⁶ Clayton, "How FBI traced Tarek Mehanna in his quest to become a jihadi."

²⁷⁷ Cruickshank, "The Militant Pipeline," p. 13.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

than in the foreign theaters of jihad, where the Westerners can be a burden because they lack the experience to be effective fighters. It was through this mechanism that Zazi, Ahmedzay, and Medunjanin hatched their plot and were given the training needed to bring the plot within days of execution.

Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab: The Christmas Day Plot (December 2009)

Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab first came in contact with Islamic extremists in Britain several years before his attempted attack. In the days after the attack, British counterterrorism officials disclosed that Abdulmutallab began “reaching out” to extremists who were under surveillance by MI5 while he was studying at University College London between 2005 and 2008.²⁷⁹ In the summer of 2005, Abdulmutallab traveled to Sana’a, the capital of Yemen, for a three-month Arabic language course.²⁸⁰ During his time there, he attended some lectures at al-Eman University, a religious university on the outskirts of Sana’a that has suspected links with terrorism, and one of the lectures Abdulmutallab attended was given by Anwar al-Awlaki, an American-born cleric who has had connections with several terrorists including some of the 9/11 hijackers.²⁸¹ American officials believe al-Awlaki to be a recruiter for al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), the al-Qaeda-affiliated terrorist network in Yemen and Saudi Arabia.²⁸²

Al-Awlaki’s fiery rhetoric resonated with Abdulmutallab, who returned to Yemen in August 2009 with a visa to resume his Arabic studies but frequently missed class in order to

²⁷⁹ David Leppard, “MI5 Knew of Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab's UK Extremist Links,” *Sunday Times Online*, January 3, 2010, Open Source Center.

²⁸⁰ Claire Newell et al., “Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab: One Boy's Journey To Jihad,” *Sunday Times Online*, January 3, 2010, Open Source Center.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

²⁸² “Anwar al-Awlaki,” *The New York Times*, April 7, 2010, http://topics.nytimes.com/topics/reference/timestopics/people/a/anwar_al_awlaki/index.html.

attend lectures at al-Eman.²⁸³ Al-Awlaki has admitted that he had “communications” with Abdulmutallab during this time.²⁸⁴ Approximately six weeks after the start of the language program, Abdulmutallab stopped going to class entirely, and between September and December, he allegedly attended an al-Qaeda training camp in Hadramawt, a poor eastern province of Yemen that is known to be an al-Qaeda stronghold.²⁸⁵ In April 2010, media sources uncovered a video of Abdulmutallab shooting automatic weapons with other militants at a training camp in the desert. The video has the AQAP logo in the corner of the screen and includes a martyrdom statement by Abdulmutallab.²⁸⁶ It is unclear what sort of training Abdulmutallab received during his months in the Yemeni desert, but when he left in early December 2009, he had the explosives and the instructions he needed to carry out his plot.

It seems likely that Abdulmutallab’s connections with extremists in Yemen facilitated his access to training and explosive materials. However, it is unclear whether his training and affiliations with AQAP are entirely responsible for the near-success of his plot; a large part of the explanation may lie in the inability of security services to “connect the dots.”²⁸⁷ In fact, Abdulmutallab made a number of tradecraft errors that increased the likelihood of his capture. For example, he bought his \$2,831-ticket from Nigeria to Detroit (with a layover in Amsterdam) in cash and did so only one week before its scheduled departure, and then, when he boarded the

²⁸³ Adam Nossiter, “Lonely Trek to Radicalism for Terror Suspect,” *The New York Times*, January 16, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/17/world/africa/17abdulmutallab.html?pagewanted=1>; and, Claire Newell et al., “Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab: One Boy’s Journey To Jihad.”

²⁸⁴ Robert F. Worth, “Cleric in Yemen Admits Meeting Airliner Plot Suspect, Journalist Says,” *The New York Times*, January 31, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/01/world/middleeast/01yemen.html>.

²⁸⁵ Terry McCarthy, “Yemen: Abdulmutallab met with al Qaeda,” *CBS Evening News*, January 7, 2010, <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2010/01/07/eveningnews/main6069269.shtml>; and, Claire Newell et al., “Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab: One Boy’s Journey To Jihad.”

²⁸⁶ Matthew Cole, Brian Ross, and Nasser Atta, “Underwear Bomber: New Video of Training, Martyrdom Statements,” *ABC News*, April 26, 2010, <http://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/underwear-bomber-video-training-martyrdom-statements/story?id=10479470>.

²⁸⁷ This statement should not be construed as a critique of the security services. The information on Abdulmutallab received by the security services was fragmented and buried among a large quantity of other data. This discussion simply acknowledges that factors, aside from training and affiliations, likely contributed to the seriousness of Abdulmutallab’s plot.

airplane, he was carrying only hand luggage.²⁸⁸ Abdulmutallab's suspicious ticket purchase and luggage details were only two among a number of clues he left for security services.

Abdulmutallab's training and the support he received from AQAP (both material and spiritual) certainly contributed to the complexity and advanced nature of the plot, but the security services' inaction may also have contributed to the circumstances needed for Abdulmutallab's plot to reach the point of execution.

The advanced stage of the plot may also be attributed to the ability of AQAP leaders to implement lessons learned from a past operation to the development of the Christmas Day plot. In August 2009, AQAP attempted to assassinate Saudi Arabia's counterterrorism chief using a suicide bomber who had concealed the explosive pentaerythritol tetranitrate (PETN) in his rectum, but the explosion succeeded only in killing the bomber, largely because his body absorbed most of the blast.²⁸⁹ It is feasible that the AQAP leaders learned from the failed attack that placing the explosives inside the bomber's body was an ineffective technique but an effective hiding place, and so they had Abdulmutallab place his explosives inside his underwear. Furthermore, in September, a United Nations expert on al-Qaeda warned American policymakers that the explosive used in the August attack could pass through airport security undetected,²⁹⁰ and the following month, a magazine article published by the leader of AQAP suggested the use of a small amount of explosives, such as in the attempted assassination, to blow up Western airports or airplanes.²⁹¹ It is unclear whether the UN expert's warning was made public, thus giving AQAP leaders the idea of using the PETN explosive in an airline bombing, or whether

²⁸⁸ Claire Newell et al., "Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab: One Boy's Journey To Jihad."

²⁸⁹ Gregory D. Johnsen, "AQAP in Yemen and the Christmas Day Terrorist Attack," *CTC Sentinel* Special Issue (January 2010): 1-4.

²⁹⁰ Eric Lipton, Eric Schmitt, and Mark Mazzetti, "Review of Jet Bomb Plot Shows More Missed Clues," *The New York Times*, January 17, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/18/us/18intel.html>.

²⁹¹ Robert Windrem, "Airline terror suspect tied to Yemen al-Qaida?," *NBC News*, December 26, 2009, http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/34596744/ns/us_news-security/.

they came up with the idea on their own. Either way, it appears that, by becoming an operative of a veteran jihadist organization, Abdulmutallab was able to implement the lessons learned from a previous bombing attack by the group in order to improve the effectiveness of his own attack.

Training and Affiliations in “Less Serious” Bombing Plots

Based on this analysis, it is clear that training at jihadist camps and affiliations with veteran jihadists (particularly explosives experts) played an important role in all of the serious bombing plots in the US since 9/11. However, it is less clear whether these serious plots are inherently different (regarding training and affiliations) from the less serious plots. In other words, are serious plots generally distinguished from all other plots by their access to training camps and explosives experts?

In general, the answer is yes. Eight of the thirteen less serious bombing plots had *distant* or *very distant* veteran affiliations and *weak* training. Training in these cases primarily included online bomb-making manuals, paintball practice, and other group-bonding activities, such as hiking or physical training. However, as stated in Chapter 3, five of the less serious plots had *close* or *very close* affiliations and *intermediate* or *strong* training, and furthermore, three of the five had at least one perpetrator who attended a jihadist training camp, and two of the five had an affiliated explosives expert. Despite these circumstances, all five failed to reach the same level of seriousness as the Shoe Bomber, Financial Institutions, Liquid Explosives, Denver, and Christmas Day plots.

The clearest example is the Jose Padilla case from May 2002. Padilla, a US citizen living in Florida, traveled to Afghanistan and attended the al-Qaeda-affiliated al-Farooq training camp

in the fall of 2000.²⁹² At al-Farooq, Padilla received weapons training on the Kalashnikov, AK-47, G-3, M-16, Uzi, and submachine guns; training on topography, communications, camouflage, clandestine surveillance, and explosives (C-4, dynamite, and mines); and physical fitness and religious training. During his time in Afghanistan, Padilla met Mohammed Atef, a senior al-Qaeda commander, who proposed a plot to blow up US apartment buildings using natural gas and sent Padilla to a location outside Qandahar to train with an al-Qaeda explosives expert.²⁹³ After his training, Padilla moved to the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region where he met Abu Zubaydah, another senior al-Qaeda commander, who sent Padilla to present his plot to KSM in Pakistan and provided Padilla with a letter of reference.²⁹⁴ In Pakistan, KSM approved the apartments plot, and Padilla received communications training and \$20,000 for the operation.²⁹⁵ When Padilla attempted to reenter the US, the FBI arrested him at Chicago's O'Hare International Airport.²⁹⁶ It is unclear how US security services began tracking Padilla, but his plot never made it off the ground once he left Pakistan. Padilla's case demonstrates that well-trained and well-connected terrorists are not always able to organize serious plots, whether due to chance or due to the capabilities of security services. Bombing plots by well-trained and -connected terrorists are simply more likely to become serious than those by homegrown, poorly-trained terrorists.

As explained in Chapter 3, jihadist cells in the US seem to increasingly consist of these homegrown, poorly-trained terrorists, not Jose Padillas or Richard Reids. Of the six bombing plots occurring between 2001 and 2004, five had *intermediate* or *strong* training and *close* or

²⁹² "Summary of Jose Padilla's Activities with Al Qaeda" (Department of Defense, May 28, 2004), <http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/DODsummary.pdf>.

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ "Profile: Jose Padilla," *BBC News*, August 16, 2007, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/2037444.stm>.

very close affiliations with veteran jihadists. However, of the six bombing plots between 2005 and 2007, only two had *intermediate* or *strong* training and *close* or *very close* affiliations, and of the six plots in 2008 and 2009, only three attained a similar level of training and affiliation. If the propensity for well-trained and -affiliated plots to become serious is juxtaposed with the trend towards increasingly homegrown terrorism, it should be expected that the number of serious plots since 9/11 would have decreased over time. However, as discussed in Chapter 2, jihadists have consistently continued to construct serious plots. This suggests that the perpetrators of the less serious bombing plots tend to be less-trained and -affiliated now than they used to be, but because determined jihadists continue to access to training camps and explosives experts, the occasional well-trained and -affiliated cell does appear, and it is these cells that have the greatest potential to develop into serious plots.

Serious Shooting Plots, Criminal Activities, and Military Experience

Kevin James: The LA Plot (August 2005)

The LA plot differs considerably from the five serious bombing plots already examined. Kevin James and his three co-conspirators had no affiliations with al-Qaeda or any other veteran jihadist organization, and they had received no formal training. This plot is the first serious jihadist plot in the US perpetrated by a truly homegrown cell. As FBI Director Robert S. Mueller explained, “This is a case in which a terrorist cell grew out of a prison cell. Despite the fact that they had no connection to al-Qaeda leaders, they had adopted their cause.”²⁹⁷ According to US court documents, the perpetrators engaged in “firearms training and physical training,” which

²⁹⁷ “Press Release: Two Plead Guilty to Domestic Terrorism Charges of Conspiring to Attack Military Facilities, Jewish Targets” (Department of Justice, United States Attorney, Central District of California, December 14, 2007), http://nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/U.S._v_James_DOJPR_GuiltyPleas.pdf.

essentially amounted to target practice at Kenneth Hahn Park in LA, but the documents mention no further means of jihadist training.²⁹⁸ As explained in the previous chapter, untrained and unaffiliated perpetrators are typical of shooting plots and attacks, but because shootings are rarely as consequential as bombings, they seldom qualify as “serious” plots. However, this plot drew a large amount of media attention because of the plotter’s meticulous planning and the plot’s proximity to execution.

Because James and his associates lacked jihadist-specific training, they had to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary for organizing a “serious” plot in some other fashion. As Michael Kenney explains, “To gain even a modest degree of proficiency in using the rifle or gun...one must actually handle, load, and fire the weapon.”²⁹⁹ In the case of James and his colleagues, they acquired this proficiency through criminal activities. Each of the perpetrators had a criminal history. James was serving time for armed robbery when he started the terrorist cell and initiated the LA shootings plot.³⁰⁰ Levar Washington, the de facto leader of the cell since James was in prison throughout the preparation of the plot, was a former member of the Rolling 60 Crips gang and had served time for assault with a deadly weapon and robbery.³⁰¹ The two remaining plotters, Gregory Patterson and Hammad Samana, joined Washington in robbing or attempting to rob eleven gas stations in the months leading up to their arrest.³⁰² The plotters’

²⁹⁸ “United States of America v. Kevin James, Levar Washington, Gregory Patterson, and Hammad Samana; Indictment” (United States District Court for the Central District of California, August 31, 2005), http://nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/U.S._v_James_Indictment.pdf; and “United States of America v. Kevin James, et al., Plea Agreement for Defendant Levar Washington” (United States District Court for the Central District of California, December 14, 2007), http://nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/U.S._v_Washington_PleaAgreement.pdf.

²⁹⁹ Kenney, “Organizational Learning and Islamic Militancy,” p. 45.

³⁰⁰ “Four charged with hatching prison terror plot,” *Associated Press*, August 31, 2005, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/9148467>.

³⁰¹ “Possible Terror Evidence in Robbery Probe,” KNBC.com in “The L.A. Plot to Attack U.S. Military, Israeli Government, & Jewish Targets” (The NEFA Foundation, January 2007), http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/LA_Plot.pdf.

³⁰² “United States of America v. Kevin James, Levar Washington, Gregory Patterson, and Hammad Samana; Indictment” (United States District Court for the Central District of California).

participation in criminal activities provided them with experience not only using firearms but also planning operations and working clandestinely, and as a result they were able to organize a serious shooting plot, which they hoped would kill thirty or forty people across the LA area.

Malik Nidal Hasan: The Fort Hood Shooting (November 2009)

Like James and his accomplices, Malik Nidal Hasan had no jihadist training, but unlike James and his group, Hasan also had no criminal background. Rather, Hasan acquired the skills and knowledge necessary for his attack through his experience in the US Army. Against the wishes of his family, Hasan joined the Army after graduating from college and entered an officer basic training program at Fort Sam Houston.³⁰³ After being commissioned in 1997, he attended medical school at the Uniformed Services University of Health Sciences, graduating in 2003 and advancing to the rank of captain.³⁰⁴ Upon completion of his internship and residency in psychiatry at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, Hasan did a two-year fellowship in preventive and disaster psychiatry and earned a master's degree in public health.³⁰⁵ He advanced to the rank of major in 2009 and was transferred to Fort Hood that summer to prepare for his deployment to Afghanistan.³⁰⁶ Hasan is the first and only perpetrator of a jihadist plot (bombing or shooting) since 9/11 who was a member of the US military.

It is unclear when Hasan began planning his attack, but he first made contact with Anwar al-Awlaki, the radical American-Yemeni cleric who inspired Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, in

³⁰³ “Nidal Malik Hasan,” *The New York Times*, November 9, 2009, http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/h/nidal_malik_hasan/index.html?scp=1-spot&sq=nidal%20malik%20hasan&st=cse.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.; and, Mark Hosenball, “Maj. Nidal M. Hasan's Official Military Record,” *Newsweek*, November 6, 2009, <http://blog.newsweek.com/blogs/decclassified/archive/2009/11/06/maj-nidal-m-hasan-s-official-military-record.aspx>.

³⁰⁵ “Nidal Malik Hasan,” *The New York Times*.

³⁰⁶ Hosenball, “Maj. Nidal M. Hasan's Official Military Record”; and, Nicholas Riccardi, “The Nation; Hasan is Charged with 13 Murders,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 13, 2009, LexisNexis Academic.

December 2008.³⁰⁷ Al-Awlaki has known links with two of the 9/11 hijackers, and American counterterrorism officials say that he is a recruiter for AQAP.³⁰⁸ Hasan exchanged as many as twenty emails with al-Awlaki asking for religious advice, including whether it would be justified for a Muslim American soldier to kill fellow soldiers.³⁰⁹ The FBI was aware of these emails but dismissed them as harmless because they appeared to be part of Hasan's psychiatric research at Walter Reed.³¹⁰ Since it is atypical of a would-be jihadist shooter to have any contact with a veteran jihadist organization, Hasan's contact with al-Awlaki might explain his ability to plan and execute a "serious" shooting. However, unlike the veteran affiliations seen in the bombing plots, Hasan's affiliation was not operationally useful. Hasan did not receive training or instructions from al-Awlaki. Rather, the relationship was likely more integral to Hasan's radicalization (i.e., the process of adopting the extremist Islamic belief system) than his attack preparations.

The explanation for Hasan's operational success lies not in his relationship with al-Awlaki but in his military background. Although Hasan's military training was focused on medicine rather than weapons and tactics, he received sufficient weapons instruction during his basic training program, and in the days leading up to the attack, he frequented a nearby shooting range.³¹¹ However, more importantly, Hasan's experience in the military gave him insider knowledge of both Fort Hood and the US military in general. He knew where, when, and how to carry out his shooting so as to maximize its effectiveness, and he could prepare for and execute

³⁰⁷ Ben Conery, Victor Morton, and Jerry Seper, "Officials say Fort Hood suspect had Islamist ties; Contacts included several in FBI probes," *The Washington Times*, November 12, 2009, LexisNexis Academic.

³⁰⁸ "Anwar al-Awlaki," *The New York Times*, April 7, 2010,

http://topics.nytimes.com/topics/reference/timestopics/people/a/anwar_al_awlaki/index.html.

³⁰⁹ Elisabeth Bumiller and Scott Shane, "Pentagon Report on Fort Hood Details Failures," *The New York Times*, January 15, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/16/us/politics/16hasan.html>.

³¹⁰ Ben Conery, Victor Morton, and Jerry Seper, "Officials say Fort Hood suspect had Islamist ties."

³¹¹ Patrik Jonsson, "Fort Hood: How Nidal Malik Hasan's path turned more radical," *Christian Science Monitor* (Atlanta, November 17, 2009), LexisNexis Academic.

the attack inconspicuously because he wore a uniform and knew his way around the base. Hasan's correspondences with al-Awlaki may have encouraged Hasan down the path toward violent jihad, but his military experience (both his weapons training and his insider knowledge) was the key to his ability to execute a successful and consequential shooting.

Criminal and Military Experience in “Less Serious” Shooting Plots and Attacks

The criminal experiences of Kevin James and his co-conspirators and the military experience of Malik Nidal Hasan were integral to the preparation and, in Hasan's case, execution of “serious” jihadist shooting plots. Since Hasan is the only perpetrator of a jihadist plot against the US to have been in the US military, his military experience clearly distinguishes him from the perpetrators of the less serious shooting plots, and therefore, it may be cited as the explanation for his ability to execute a “serious” attack. However, based on the narrative account of the LA plot, it is unclear whether the criminal experiences of its perpetrators distinguish them from the perpetrators of less serious shooting plots.

As stated in Chapter 3, three other shooting plots involved perpetrators with criminal backgrounds, and two of these reached advanced stages of planning, but none of them were classified as “serious” plots. However, the LA plotters differed from the perpetrators of at least two of these less serious plots; the LA plotters had criminal experience that was relevant to their planned operation, whereas the criminal activities of the others likely had little impact on their capabilities as terrorists. James and his accomplices' involvement in robberies, gangs, and armed assault gave them experience using firearms and planning and executing clandestine operations, useful skills for planning shootings against military recruitment offices. On the other hand, the criminal experiences of the perpetrators of the two less serious plots were not relevant to their

jihadist attacks. The first of these was a plot to attack the soldiers at Fort Dix in New Jersey using assault rifles and grenades.³¹² Three of the co-conspirators had criminal histories, but they consisted of charges for physical threats, obstruction of justice, hindering apprehension, traffic violations, disorderly conduct, and drug possession.³¹³ The second plot was a successfully executed shooting at an army recruiting station in Little Rock, Arkansas. The shooter, Abdulhakim Muhammed, had had several run-ins with the law including delinquency on paying rent, driving with an expired license, overstaying a visa in Yemen, and carrying a fraudulent Somali passport.³¹⁴ Unlike the criminal experience of the LA plotters, the criminal activities of Muhammed and the Fort Dix plotters did not directly provide them with the knowledge and skills needed to carry out a “serious” shooting.

Unlike the perpetrators of the Fort Dix plot and the Little Rock shooting, the perpetrators of the third less serious plot, a planned shooting at the Quantico Marine Corps Base in Virginia, had criminal experience that was relevant to their plot. One was accused of robbing banks in Pakistan; another pled guilty to involvement in a gunpoint robbery and was wanted for copper pipe theft in Texas; a third pled guilty to involvement in a gunpoint robbery and was convicted for drug possession and physical assault; and a fourth was reportedly charged with attempted murder, extortion, and robbery in Bosnia.³¹⁵ Despite the perpetrator’s relevant criminal backgrounds, security services were able to disrupt their plot when it was only in its early stages of planning. However, the perpetrators’ failure to construct a “serious” plot may be explained by

³¹² Dale Russakoff and Dan Eggen, “Six Charged in Plot To Attack Fort Dix,” *Washington Post*, May 9, 2007, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/05/08/AR2007050800465.html>.

³¹³ Jonathan Dienst, “Some N.J. Terror Suspects had Past Run-Ins with Law,” *wnbc.com*, May 10, 2007, in “The Fort Dix Plot” (The NEFA Foundation, January 2008), <http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/fortdixplot.pdf>, p. 18.

³¹⁴ “The Little Rock, Arkansas Recruiting Station Shooting” (The NEFA Foundation, June 2009), http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/NEFA_littlerockrecruitingshooting.pdf.

³¹⁵ “The North Carolina Jihad Cell and the Quantico Marine Base Plot” (The NEFA Foundation, November 2009), http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/nefa_NCJihadCell1109.pdf.

examining the path by which they arrived at the Quantico plot. The Quantico Marine Base was not their first choice target. Rather, they had traveled abroad on several occasions to Israel, Jordan, Kosovo, and Pakistan to engage in violent jihad, and they only resorted to the idea of attacking Quantico after they found committing jihad abroad to be impossible.³¹⁶ Only one of the eight perpetrators, an American named Daniel Patrick Boyd who had trained and fought in Afghanistan and Pakistan in the early 1990s, had the skills and knowledge needed to engage in jihad abroad.³¹⁷ The others were largely untrained, and it was during their travels abroad that security services began tracking them.³¹⁸ Therefore, it may be concluded that their shooting plot failed in spite of their relevant criminal backgrounds and because of their overly ambitious attempts to engage in jihad abroad. Furthermore, it may be concluded that the primary factor that distinguishes James and his co-conspirators from the perpetrators of less serious shooting plots and that explains their ability to construct a serious plot was their *relevant* criminal backgrounds.

Trends and Lessons Based on the Case Studies

To say that the jihadist training, affiliations with veteran jihadists, or background experiences of a cell's members determine the cell's operational effectiveness is to simplify the situation. The success or failure of a given plot is influenced by a complex web of factors, including luck or chance as well as factors related to security service capabilities. Training,

³¹⁶“United States of America v. Daniel Patrick Boyd, Hysen Sherifi, Anes Subasic, Zakariya Boyd, Dylan Boyd, Mohammad Omar Aly Hassan, Ziyad Yaghi; Indictment” (United States District Court for the Eastern District of North Carolina, Western Division, July 22, 2009), http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/US_v_Boyd_indictment.pdf; and, “United States of America v. Daniel Patrick Boyd, Hysen Sherifi, Anes Subasic, Zakariya Boyd, Dylan Boyd, Jude Kenan Mohammad, Mohammad Omar Aly Hassan, Ziyad Yaghi; Superseding Indictment” (United States District Court for the Eastern District of North Carolina, Western Division, September 24, 2009), http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/US_v_Boyd_spcindictment.pdf.

³¹⁷“United States of America v. Daniel Patrick Boyd, Hysen Sherifi, Anes Subasic, Zakariya Boyd, Dylan Boyd, Mohammad Omar Aly Hassan, Ziyad Yaghi; Indictment” (United States District Court for the Eastern District of North Carolina, Western Division).

³¹⁸ Victoria Cherrie, “Court in North Carolina Hears Tapes in Terror Case,” *The New York Times*, August 4, 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/05/us/05terror.html?_r=1.

affiliations, and background experiences are a single, nonetheless important, part of the web, and the seven “serious” plots demonstrate the influence training, affiliations, and background experience can have on operational effectiveness by facilitating access to the skills, knowledge, and materials necessary to construct a serious plot. The Shoe Bomber plot provides the clearest example of the influence of training and affiliations on a bombing plot. During Richard Reid’s time in Afghanistan, he received formal training in the al-Qaeda camps and made contact with a variety of al-Qaeda members and leaders, including explosives expert Abu Khabab al-Masri. Reid’s training provided him with the tradecraft skills he needed to continue preparing the plot when he returned to Europe as well as at least a basic understanding of explosives. Furthermore, his jihadist affiliations provided him access to explosive devices as well as a support network in Europe.

While the Shoe Bomber case illustrates the effects of formal jihadist training and direct contacts with al-Qaeda, the Financial Institutions plot demonstrates the use of outside expertise to supplement traditional training and veteran affiliations. Dhiren Barot received extensive training from various veteran jihadist organizations and fostered relationships with high-level veteran jihadist operatives, but he also recruited Western accomplices with useful (non-terrorist) skills or backgrounds, such as an understanding of architecture or security systems. Barot’s case shows that although traditional training and affiliations (such as seen in Reid’s case) are clearly useful, other skill sets and experience may also be beneficial.

The Liquid Explosives plot highlights an interesting caveat to the Shoe Bomber and Financial Institutions plots and demonstrates some of the dangers of close association with a jihadist group abroad. Abdullah Ahmed Ali and his associates were able to construct a complex and serious plot, but their efforts were detected by security services fairly early in the plot’s

preparation. Security services may have been able to detect and track the cell's activities because of the close contact between Rashid Rauf in Pakistan and the cell in the UK, or because of the extensive support network, which spanned three continents and involved many operatives who did not have proper tradecraft training. This plot shows that terrorists need to balance the operational benefits of having close contact with a larger jihadist organization (e.g. improved tradecraft, access to explosives, logistical support, etc.) with the costs of such contacts (e.g., increased ease of detection). In addition, it demonstrates the need for a sufficient level of training for most of the individuals involved, particularly when the plot involves an extensive support network.

The Denver plot illustrates that jihadist training camps have an even more important role in serious bombing plots against the US than suggested by the previous three plots. Training at jihadist camps abroad is not only essential to acquiring the skills and knowledge needed to carry out a bombing plot in the US, but, in some cases, it is also integral to prompting the *idea* of carrying out an attack against the American homeland. Like many Western wannabe jihadists, Najibullah Zazi and his accomplices traveled abroad to wage jihad against the US and its allied forces in Afghanistan. However, upon arriving at the jihadist training camps, Zazi and his colleagues were convinced to return to the US and wage jihad there. Veteran jihadist organizations often find Western jihadists to be more useful in their home countries, where they are accustomed to the people, the language, and the culture, than in theaters of conflict abroad, where they usually do not have the skills or experience to be effective fighters. This increasingly popular (and threatening) trend of sending radicalized and trained Westerners back to the West helps explain the continued development of serious bombing plots in the US.

Like the Denver plot, the Christmas Day plot also illustrates another benefit of training at a jihadist camp and becoming affiliated with a veteran jihadist group: learning from the mistakes of previous jihadist bombing attempts. Because Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab was an AQAP operative rather than a lone-wolf terrorist, he was able to use the lessons learned from another AQAP bombing operation, the attempted assassination of the Saudi Arabian counterterrorism chief.³¹⁹ By working with veteran jihadists groups, would-be bombers are able to construct innovative bombing plots that reach the point of execution without arousing the suspicions of the security services.

The narrative accounts of these five bombing plots provided in this chapter help elucidate the theory proposed in the previous chapter that the continued emergence of serious bombing plots in the US may be largely explained by jihadist recruits' continued access to training camps. Based on close examination of the five serious bombing plots, it can be concluded that training camps are integral to the continued emergence of bombing plots for four main reasons. First, through hands-on experience, jihadist recruits are able to gain the skills and knowledge needed to be operationally effective jihadists. Second, training camps give recruits access to the instruction and materials necessary to acquire or assemble explosive devices. Third, jihadist instructors and leaders have inspired an increasing number of Western recruits to attack the US homeland rather than participate in jihad abroad. Fourth and finally, recruits who attend training camps may be able to learn from the mistakes of past bombing attempts and construct increasingly innovative plots.

In addition to discussing the influence of training camps, the analysis in Chapter 3 also suggested personal contact with an explosives expert to be particularly valuable for the

³¹⁹ It is possible that lone-wolf terrorists could similarly learn from past bombing attempts, by reading news reports and court documents, but the learning process is certainly facilitated by affiliation with a veteran jihadist group, who is likely to implement lessons learned from past attacks into its training curriculum.

perpetrators of serious bombing plots. However, the narrative accounts of the five serious bombing plots do not indicate that explosives experts were especially integral to the plots. In the three plots that had an affiliated explosives expert, the Shoe Bomber, Liquid Explosives, and Christmas Day plots, the “explosives expert” was the training camp instructor who taught the perpetrator or perpetrators how to handle explosives and, in some cases, provided the perpetrator(s) with the explosives for the plot. However, in each of these cases, it is unclear whether the explosives expert continued to use his expertise to advanced the plot after the perpetrators returned to their home countries. Therefore, having an affiliated explosives expert may not be integral to organizing a serious bombing plot. Rather, the key may simply be having access to explosives training and materials, which the perpetrators of all five plots did as a result of attending jihadist training camps and making contacts with veteran jihadist leaders and operatives.

The serious bombing plot narratives also illuminate a couple of caveats to the theory of a positive relationship between jihadist training or affiliations and serious bombing plots. First, affiliations with veteran jihadists may actually be detrimental to planning an attack against the American homeland because they provide a larger number of opportunities for security services to discover the plot than would exist if the cell was operating on its own. Second, non-jihadist training and expertise may be used to supplement jihadist training and may further facilitate the advancement of the plot.

In the case of serious shooting plots, non-terrorist experiences and expertise actually act as a substitute for the jihadist training and affiliations that appear to be integral to bombing plots. Most shooting plot perpetrators have limited, if any, jihadist training and affiliations, therefore the would-be shooters who have the most relevant background experiences are the ones who are

able to organize serious shooting plots. In the two cases examined in this study, the perpetrators had either military or criminal backgrounds. In the LA plot, Kevin James and his co-conspirators had each participated in at least one armed robbery, and one of them had also been convicted of armed assault and gang violence. Participation in these criminal operations provided the perpetrators with experience handling weapons, operating clandestinely, and planning attacks.

Similarly, the perpetrator of the Fort Hood shooting acquired the experience and skills he needed for his attack through his background experience, but his background was military rather than criminal, and as a result, he acquired a slightly different set of skills. Because of his experience as an officer in the US Army, Malik Nidal Hasan was comfortable handling weapons, and, perhaps more importantly, he was comfortable navigating his target. Both Hasan and the LA plotters gained proficiency in using firearms, but whereas James and his accomplices learned how to plan attacks and operate clandestinely from their criminal background, Hasan's military background was more useful for providing him with insider knowledge of his target that he could use to make his attack more effective. Nonetheless, in both cases, the background experiences of the perpetrators were essential to the preparation (and execution) of serious shooting plots. Therefore, it can be concluded that while serious bombing plots continue to emerge because jihadist wannabes attend training camps and make contact with veteran jihadist organizations, serious shooting plots continue to emerge because individuals with relevant background experiences (particularly military and criminal) become radicalized and turn their skills and knowledge toward carrying out a jihadist attack.

Examining only these serious plots suggests a bleak outlook for the future, but if the less-advanced plots are added to the analysis, two promising trends emerge. First, not all jihadists who have the requisite qualifications (i.e., training, affiliations, or relevant background) are able

to construct serious plots. As demonstrated by the Jose Padilla case, some well-trained and -affiliated terrorists are unable to construct serious bombing plots. Perhaps the FBI was particularly adept at gathering information on Padilla, or perhaps Padilla was just less lucky than his more successful counterparts. His case nonetheless shows that it is possible for security services to dismantle these plots before they reach an advanced stage. Furthermore, as indicated by the Fort Dix, Little Rock, and Quantico plots, some jihadists with criminal backgrounds are unable to carry out serious shootings. Whether the criminal activities of the perpetrators were not relevant preparation for the planned jihadist plot, or the surrounding circumstances made it easier for security services to track and apprehend the perpetrators, shooting plots (even successful ones) may fall short of the “serious” threshold.

The second promising trend is that the jihadist threat in the US is increasingly homegrown and poorly-trained. These plots may still pose a danger if the perpetrators are able to make contact with veteran jihadists or if they have the background experience needed to commit a shooting. However, based on the dataset used in this study, all homegrown and poorly-trained would-be bombers and most would-be shooters who lacked relevant background experience were apprehended by security services before their plots reached an advanced stage of planning, and the “inexperienced” shooters who successfully executed their attacks did not commit shootings that were sufficiently consequential to be considered “serious.” However, as long as Western recruits can access training camps and establish contacts with veteran jihadists and as long as criminals or military personnel can become radicalized jihadists, the US will continue to face serious bombing and shooting plots in the future.

Chapter 5
Conclusion:
The Good News and the Bad

Does jihadist terrorism pose a serious threat to the American homeland? As with many questions, the answer is: yes and no. The jihadists who have targeted the American homeland in the past decade have been largely homegrown and poorly-trained, and although they still pose a threat, it is a manageable one. Yet, the US remains the target of serious jihadist plots and attacks. The three major findings in this study explain this apparent anomaly. First, homegrown, poorly-trained jihadists are *generally* not a serious threat to the American homeland because they lack the tradecraft skills to avoid detection. Second, serious jihadist bombing plots against the US continue to emerge nonetheless, primarily as a result of Western jihadists' access to training camps and veteran jihadist organizations. Third, serious jihadist shooting plots and attacks continue to materialize as well, largely due to the radicalization of individuals with criminal or military backgrounds.

The conclusion that homegrown and poorly-trained jihadists do not pose a serious threat may seem intuitive, but some authorities have suggested that because homegrown terrorists have limited or no contact with other jihadists, can radicalize quickly, and may be individuals who appear well-integrated into society, they are difficult to identify and apprehend, and therefore,

they pose a serious threat.³²⁰ However, these concerns appear to be relatively unfounded. None of the poorly-trained and poorly-affiliated would-be bombers in my dataset managed to advance their plots past the point of target selection; they were all apprehended before they began building or acquiring the necessary explosives. The perpetrators simply did not have the tradecraft skills or the explosives expertise and access to bring their plots to an advanced stage, and many of them fell victim to FBI informants or undercover agents. This portrayal of homegrown jihadists as a generally limited threat is not intended to indicate that homegrown jihadists can or should be disregarded but rather that security services are clearly capable of identifying and apprehending them, particularly through the use of informants, as the FBI and other services have increasingly done over the past decade.

Although American security services have historically been capable of disrupting the plots of poorly-trained and poorly-affiliated would-be bombers, they have a less-than-perfect record regarding would-be jihadist shooters. Because shooting plots require much less preparation than bombing plots, they offer security services fewer opportunities to uncover the plot and thus have a greater chance of succeeding. The perpetrators of five of the eight jihadist shooting plots since 9/11 either successfully executed their attacks or managed to acquire the necessary weapons before security services disrupted the plot. Fortunately, because shootings are simpler (both in preparation and execution) than bombings, they also tend to be less consequential. Therefore, even if a shooting plot is successfully executed, it may not pose a serious threat to national security.³²¹ Of the three successful shootings since 9/11, only one, the

³²⁰ Mitchell D. Silber and Arvin Bhatt, “Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat” (New York City Police Department, 2007).

³²¹ This statement does not intend to belittle the deaths that have occurred because of jihadist shootings in the US; it simply aims to place the shootings in perspective and judge their physical, economic, and psychological impact on the nation *as a whole*.

Fort Hood shooting, can be classified as “serious.”³²² Therefore, although untrained and unaffiliated jihadists may plot (and even execute) shootings, these plots and attacks generally do not constitute a serious threat to US national security.

Although poorly-trained, homegrown jihadists appear to pose a minimal threat, the situation can quickly become more dangerous if these jihadists are able to make contact with a veteran jihadist organization. This situation represents the second conclusion of this study: a jihadist who makes contact with a veteran jihadist group and attends its training camps has a strong potential to construct a serious bombing plot. Throughout the past two decades, determined, Western, jihadist wannabes (American and otherwise) have traveled to the Middle East in the name of jihad, and many have made contact with veteran jihadist organizations, primarily al-Qaeda but also others such as al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), and the Pakistani Taliban.

Working and training with these organizations prepares Western jihadists for constructing serious bombing plots against the US in four respects.³²³ First, jihadist instructors and leaders instill Western recruits with the *idea* of returning to the West and conducting an attack. Most Western jihadist wannabes who travel overseas intend to receive training and then wage jihad abroad (against US troops and allied forces), but jihadist organizations generally do not find Western recruits to be experienced or effective fighters and therefore encourage them to return to their home countries and carry out attacks there. Therefore, jihadists who had not considered

³²² The other two caused casualties but these were limited, as was the economic and psychological impact on the rest of the nation.

³²³ This study focuses solely on the operational training and advantages accrued from participating in a veteran jihadist organization and attending its training camps. I do not consider the spiritual, motivational, and psychological effects of becoming part of a larger jihadist community and training with fellow jihadists. However, jihadist theoreticians consider the radicalization and indoctrination process (i.e., the social and religious preparation) undergone as part of a recruit’s training to be more important than the physical aspects of the training. (Brynjar Lia, “Doctrines for Jihadi Terrorist Training,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 20, no. 4 (2008), p. 519)

attacking the US are suddenly determined to do so because they have been told that they are indispensable to the jihadist movement for their ability to infiltrate the enemy's homeland.

Second, once the Western recruits have been convinced to return to the West and conduct attacks, they are given training and instruction in terrorist tradecraft (i.e., techniques for operating clandestinely in a hostile environment without detection). At the training camps, they acquire the skills and knowledge that are needed to become operationally effective jihadists and that can only be acquired through hands-on experience. According to some scholars, jihadists can gain this experience through mechanisms other than veteran jihadist training camps, such as mentorships, combat experience, and on-the-job training. However, the cases in my dataset suggest that these mechanisms are not as effective as the training camps. None of the cases in the dataset had perpetrators who effectively acquired the requisite skills and knowledge to construct a serious plot through one of these alternative methods without also attending a training camp.

Third, in addition to gaining proficiency in tradecraft, the jihadists who attend training camps also have access to the training and materials needed to acquire or assemble explosive devices for their plots. Jihadists who try to build bombs using only online manuals or recipes generally fail in their attempts because the instructions are typically inaccurate or incomplete and because the jihadists lack the intuitive understanding of how to handle and prepare dangerous materials. This understanding can only be acquired by working with explosives under the supervision of an expert. Even some of the jihadists who have attended training camps still do not have the skills to assemble a functioning explosive device, but because they have established connections with jihadist groups, they may be able to acquire the device already assembled, as in the cases of Richard Reid and Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab.

Fourth and finally, by affiliating themselves with veteran jihadist organizations, these would-be bombers have the opportunity to use the lessons learned from past bombing attempts by the group. Veteran jihadist organizations may teach Western recruits innovative tactics and techniques that improve upon those that were used by previous bombers and that either succeeded, failed, or have since been counteracted by new security measures. This type of learning was only apparent in one of my five bombing case studies, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab's attempted bombing. However, learning may have occurred less directly in the other cases as well. For example, Richard Reid's use of shoe bombs was an innovative tactic, which may have resulted from lessons learned from the 9/11 attacks, such as the effectiveness of targeting airplanes or the cleverness needed to pass through airport security. It is difficult to determine what sort of the learning process occurs within a terrorist organization as a whole, but it is clear that a jihadist affiliated with a veteran organization would have a greater chance of implementing lessons from past bombing attempts than would a homegrown, untrained jihadist.

The combination of these four factors (inspiration to attack the US, tradecraft instruction, explosives training and access to materials, and use of lessons learned from previous plots) largely accounts for the continued emergence of serious jihadist bombing plots in the US since 9/11. However, it does not explain the two serious shooting plots that occurred in the past decade. The third conclusion of this study asserts that serious shooting plots continue to arise because individuals who have criminal or military backgrounds are radicalized and then turn their skills and knowledge toward conducting shootings in the name of their newfound (jihadist) cause. Fortunately, not all individuals with criminal backgrounds are able to perpetrate serious shooting plots, since many of them have criminal histories that are largely irrelevant to the planning and execution of a shooting. Such criminal histories include those consisting of charges

for drug possession, traffic violations, illegal residence, disorderly conduct, and other infractions that do not involve the use of firearms or participation in a clandestine network or group.

However, some individuals have *relevant* criminal and military experiences that give them proficiency handling and using firearms, practice operating clandestinely and planning attacks, and familiarity with their targets. When these individuals become radicalized, a process that frequently occurs during a criminal's time in prison, the possibility arises that they will plan and even execute serious shooting plots.

Based on this analysis, the US faces two distinct threats, one posed by would-be jihadist bombers and the other, by would-be jihadist shooters. The first threat consists of individuals who become radicalized, connect with veteran jihadist groups and attend their training camps, and then return to their home countries with plans for bombing attacks and the skills and knowledge to perpetrate them. The second consists of individuals with background experiences that predispose them to be effective shooters who subsequently become radicalized and then plot and carry out shootings. US security services should approach these two groups differently if they hope to prevent serious plots and attacks. For the bombing cases, the point at which a would-be bomber transitions from a manageable threat to a serious one is the point at which he makes contact with a veteran jihadist organization. Therefore, for these cases, it is necessary for security services to detect contacts and connections between Westerners and veteran jihadists and to apprehend wannabe jihadists before they embark upon the training phase. For the would-be shooters, on the other hand, the point of concern is not the training phase but rather the radicalization phase. The would-be shooters already have the skills and knowledge needed to conduct an attack, but they do not become a serious jihadist threat until they have been radicalized, at which point they can use their background experience (“training”) to perpetrate an

attack in support of the jihadist cause. Therefore, for these cases, security services should identify and monitor the radicalization of individuals with criminal records or military experience and apprehend the jihadists before they begin planning a violent attack.

Granted, the task of monitoring contacts between radicalized Westerners and veteran jihadists as well as the task of detecting the radicalization of criminals and military personnel are both tall orders for US security services. However, a first step toward accomplishing these tasks is understanding the importance of distinguishing between bombing and shooting plots (particularly regarding training, affiliations, and background) and recognizing the critical point (at which the threat becomes a serious one) for each: the affiliations and training phase, for would-be bombers, and the radicalization phase, for would-be shooters.

As I write this concluding chapter, the newspapers and media sources are filled with reports about a failed car bombing attempt in New York's Times Square. When I read these, I breathe a sigh of relief partly because the US dodged another bullet but also because this plot confirms many of the conclusions I have reached. On May 1, 2010, Pakistani-American Faisal Shahzad parked his Nissan Pathfinder in the heart of Times Square and lit the fuse of a crude bomb made from gasoline, propane, firecrackers and alarm clocks that only succeeded in catching part of the car's interior on fire.³²⁴ The bomb was certainly less sophisticated than those used by Richard Reid and Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, but the advanced stage of the plot and the iconic value of the target qualify it as a "serious" threat. Security services are still investigating the origins of the plot, but authorities suspect that Shahzad was supported and

³²⁴ "Times Square Bomb Attempt (May 1, 2010)," *The New York Times*, May 14, 2010, http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/subjects/t/times_square_bomb_attempt_may_1_2010/index.html

possibly trained by the Pakistani Taliban.³²⁵ Furthermore, Shahzad has claimed that during his most recent trip to Pakistan, which ended in February 2010, he received bomb-making training in Waziristan.³²⁶ It must be noted that none of these allegations have been confirmed, but they seem to follow a familiar pattern: an individual becomes radicalized, travels to the Middle East where he makes contact with a jihadist group and receives training, and then returns to the US to construct a serious bombing plot. It is my hope that the US will continue to avoid major tragedies such as those that could have befallen the nation if Richard Reid, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, or Faisal Shahzad had succeeded or such as the one that did befall the nation at Fort Hood. However, if we hope to downgrade the jihadist threat from a serious one to a manageable one, we must continue to analyze and reevaluate the terrain, understanding who the jihadists are and how they plan and prepare for their attacks.

³²⁵ Mark Mazzetti and Scott Shane, "Evidence Mounts for Taliban Role in Bomb Plot," *The New York Times*, May 5, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/06/nyregion/06bomb.html>.

³²⁶ "United States of America v. Faisal Shahzad; Complaint" (District Court of the United States, Southern District of New York, May 4, 2010), <http://documents.nytimes.com/official-complaint-us-vs-shahzad#document/p1>.

Appendix: Jihadist Plots Against the US, September 2001 – December 2009

Plot No.	Date Arrested	Main Perpetrator(s)	Aliases	Accomplices
U01	12/22/2001	Richard Colvin Reid	Abdul Ra'uff, Abdul-Raheem, Abdul Raheem, Abu Ibrahim	Sajid Badat
U02	5/8/2002	Jose Padilla	Abdullah al-Muhajir, Ibrahim, Abu Abdullah the Puerto Rican, Abu Abdullah al-Mujahir	Binyam Ahmed Muhammad
U03	7/4/2002	Hesham Mohamed Ali Hadayet	None	None
U04	3/1/2003	Iyman Faris	Mohammad Rauf	None
U05	6/8/2003	Ahmed Omar Abu Ali	Ashraf, Hani, Hanimohawk, Reda, Abi Umar, Abu Abdullah	None
U06	8/3/2004 (in the UK)	Dhiren Barot	Esa al-Britani, Abu Esa al-Britani, Esa al-Hindi, Issa al-Hindi	Nadeem Tarmohamed, Mohammed Naveed Bhatti, Abdul Aziz Jalil, Zia ul-Haq, Qaisar Shaffi, Omar Abdur Rehman, Junade Feroze
U07	8/27/2004	James Elshafay and Shahawar Matin Siraj	None	None
U08	8/31/2005 (indictment) - James in jail, Washington and Patterson arrested 7/5, Samana arrested 8/2	Levar Haley Washington, Gregory Vernon Patterson, Hammad Riaz Samana, and Kevin James	James (aka, Shakyh Shahaab Murshid, Abdul-Wahid Ash-Sheena, As-Sudaani, Ash-Shafi'e, Ash Shakyh Sudani, Shahaab Murshid Abdoul-Wahid Sudani, Shihab James, Abdul Wahid, Shahaab Murshid, Shahaab James), Washington (aka, Abdur Rahman, Numair, Numair Abd Rahman, Shihab Numair Abd Rahman, Numair Abd Rahman Ash-Sheena, Emir), Patterson (aka, Bilal)	None
U09	12/5/2005	Michael C. Reynolds	Fritz Mueller	None
U10	3/23/2006 (Ahmed), 4/20/2006 (Sadequee)	Syed Haris Ahmed and Ehsanul Islam Sadequee	Ahmed (aka, Haris, Turab, thandymazaq), Sadequee (aka, Shifa, Aboo Khubayb Almuwahhid, Khubz)	Fahim Ahmad (aka, James), Azdi Omani, Younis Tsouli (aka, Irhabi007), Aabid Hussein Khan (aka, Abu Umar), Mirsad Bektasevic, Safiullah Hussaini, Asad Khan, "Jamal", a number of other co-conspirators listed in the NEFA report
U11	4/27/2006 (Hammoud arrested in Lebanon)	Assem Hammoud	Hammoud (aka, Amir Andalousli)	7 unnamed accomplices (1 arrested in Canada, 1 in England, 5 "largely identified")
U12	6/22/2006 (Batiste, Herrera, Augustin, Lemorin, Augustine), Phanor and Abraham already in jail	Narseal Batiste, Patrick Abraham, Stanley Grant Phanor, Naudimar Herrera, Burson Augustin, Lyglenson Lemorin, and Rotschild Augstine	Batiste (aka, Brother Naz, Prince Manna), Abraham (aka, Brother Pat), Phanor (aka, Brother Sunni), Herrera (aka, Brother Naudy), Augustin (aka, Brother B), Lemorin (aka, Brother Levi, Brother Levi-El), Augustine (aka, Brother Rot)	Charles Stewart (aka, Sultan Khanbey)
U13	8/10/2006 (in the UK)	Abdullah Ahmed Ali, Tanvir Hussain, Umar Islam, Arafat Waheed Khan, Assad Ali Sarwar, Adam Khatib, Ibrahim Savant, Waheed Zaman, Donald Douglas Stuart-Whyte, Nabeel Hussain, Mohammed Yasar Gulzar, Mohammed Shamin Uddin	Abdullah Ali (aka, Abdullah Ali Ahmed Khan), Islam (aka, Brian Young), Stewart-Whyte (aka, Abdul Waheed)	As many as 3 cells involved in the plot

Plot No.	Date Arrested	Main Perpetrator(s)	Aliases	Accomplices
U14	12/6/2006	Derrick Shareef	Talib Abu Salam Ibn Shareef	Hassan Abu-Jihaad (aka, Paul Hall)
U15	5/7/2007	Mohamad Ibrahim Shnewer, Dritan Duka, Eljvir Duka, Shain Duka, Serdar Tatar, Agron Abdullahu	Dritan Duka (aka, Distan Duka, Anthony Duka, Tony Duka), Eljvir Duka (aka, Elvis Duka, Sulayman)	None
U16	6/2/2007	Russell Defreitas, Kareem Ibrahim, Abdul Kadir, Abdel Nur	Drefreitas (aka, Mohammed), Ibrahim (aka, Amir Kareem, Winston Kingston), Kadir (aka, Aubrey Michael Seaforth), Nur (aka, Compton Eversley)	Up to 7 (in Guyana and Trinidad)
U17	11/14/2008	Bryant Neal Vinas	Ibrahim, Bashir al-Ameriki, Ben Yameen al-Kanadee	None
U18	5/20/2009	James Cromitie, David Williams, Onta Williams, Laguerre Payen	Cromitie (aka, Abdul Rahman, Abdul Rehman), David Williams (aka, Daoud, DL), Onta Williams (aka, Hamza), Payen (aka, Amin, Almondo)	None
U19	6/1/2009	Abdulhakim Mujahid Muhammed	Carlos Bledsoe	None
U20	7/27/2009	Daniel Patrick Boyd, Hysen Sherifi, Anes Subasic, Zakariya Boyd, Dylan Boyd, Mohammad Omar Aly Hassan, Ziyad Yaghi, Jude Kenan Mohammad	DBoyd (aka, Saifullah), ZBoyd (aka, Zak), DyBoyd (aka, Mohammed)	None
U21	9/19/2009	Najibullah Zazi	None	Zarein Ahmedzay (aka, Omar), Adis Medunjanin (aka, Muhammad)
U22	9/23/2009	Michael Finton	Talib Islam	None
U23	9/24/2009	Hosam Maher Husein Smadi	None	None
U24	10/21/2009	Tarek Mehanna	None	Ahmad Abousamra and an unnamed man (later became an informant)
U25	11/5/2009	Malik Nidal Hasan	None	None
U26	12/25/2009	Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab	None	None

Plot No.	Successful?	If failed/foiled, why?	Informant?	Specific Target Selected?	Weapons Acquired?	Seriousness
U01	Failed	Ineffective tradecraft (failed to light wet fuse)	None described	Yes (Paris-Miami American Airlines flight)	Yes	2
U02	Foiled	Arrested (unclear why FBI arrested him)	None described	No (apartment high-rises generally)	No	4
U03	Successful	N/A	None described	Yes (El Al ticket counter at LAX)	Yes	1
U04	Foiled	Arrested (secretly; FBI/police had been tracking him)	None described	Yes (Brooklyn Bridge and Columbus Mall)	No	4
U05	Foiled	Arrested (in Saudi Arabia in connection with a bombing in Riyadh, transferred to US in Feb. 2005)	None described	Yes (President Bush, commercial jets transiting US airspace)	No	4
U06	Foiled	Arrested (UK found laptops/CD-ROMs with his plans in West London and Pakistan)	None described	Yes (IMF and World Bank HQ in DC, NYSE and Citigroup buildings in NYC, and Prudential building in Newark - at least for the US)	No (but very specific plans, "final stages")	3.5
U07	Foiled	Arrested (using an informant and an undercover cop)	Osama Eldawoody, Kamil Pasha (undercover NYPD officer)	Yes (Herald Sq. subway station)	No	4
U08	Foiled	Arrested (for robbery)	None described	Yes (10 military recruitment offices in southern CA, El Al at LAX, National Guard facilities in LA, Israeli consulate in LA, synagogues and other Jewish targets in LA)	Yes (shotgun and rifle)	3
U09	Foiled	Arrested (sting operation)	Shannen Rossmiller (posed as AQ operative on online chat, working for FBI)	Yes (Williams natural gas refinery in WY, Transcontinental Pipeline, Standard Oil refinery in NJ)	No (but did have at least one grenade)	4
U10	Foiled	Arrested (FBI had been tracking them, conducted series of interviews when Ahmed returned to US from Pakistan)	None described	No (identified possible targets, inc. Dobbins Air Reserve Base in Marietta, US Capitol, Pentagon, World Bank HQ, DoEnergy HQ, Masonic Temple in Alexandria, large fuel storage tanks in N VA)	No (but a couple of co-conspirators had firearms and/or explosives)	4
U11	Foiled	Arrested (in Beirut after being tracked on an Islamist website)	None described	Yes (PATH train tunnel under Hudson River)	No	4
U12	Foiled	Arrested/Indicted (citizen alerted FBI who implanted an informant)	Yes (name unknown; defendants believed him to be an AQ member)	Yes (Chicago's Sears Tower; FBI buildings in Miami, LA, NYC, Chicago, and DC; other government buildings in Miami-Dade County)	No (had requested machine guns, and maybe explosives, from informant)	4
U13	Foiled	Arrested (British, Pakistani, and US security had been tracking them for months after being tipped off by a UK citizen)	None described	Yes (5-10 planes leaving London for the US)	Yes (had required components)	3

Plot No.	Successful?	If failed/foiled, why?	Informant?	Specific Target Selected?	Weapons Acquired?	Seriousness
U14	Failed	Arrested (when he attempted to buy weapons from an undercover agent)	Yes (William "Jamaal" Chrisman)	Yes (shopping mall in Rockford, IL)	Yes (but they were non-functioning ones provided by an undercover agent)	4
U15	Failed	Arrested (FBI had been tracking them for 16 months; set up a fake weapons deal)	Mahmoud Omar (car dealer/mechanic; legal immigrant from Egypt; criminal history), 2nd unnamed informant	Yes (Fort Dix Army base)	Yes (handguns, shotguns, and semi-automatic weapons; planning to acquire fully automatics, more semi-automatics, and more handguns but they were supplied by the FBI)	3
U16	Failed	Arrested (16-month US investigation initiated by CIA in South America & Caribbean)	Yes ("Anas," member of the same mosque as Defreitas in Brooklyn)	Yes (JFK fuel tanks and pipeline)	No	4
U17	Failed	Arrested (by Pakistani military directed by the US)	None described	Yes (Long Island Rail Road)	No	4
U18	Failed	Arrested (after placed inert FBI-provided explosives outside the Jewish targets)	Yes (unnamed)	Yes (military aircraft at NY Air National Guard Base in Newburgh, and a synagogue and Jewish center in the Bronx)	Yes (but they were non-functioning ones provided by an undercover agent)	4
U19	Successful	N/A	None described	Yes (Army Recruiting Office in Little Rock)	Yes	1
U20	Failed	Arrested	None described	Yes (Marine Corps Base Quantico)	Yes (guns and ammunition acquired)	4
U21	Failed	Ineffective tradecraft (perpetrators abandoned the attack just days before execution because they learned that FBI was tracking them)	Yes (Ahmad Wais Afzali, an imam in Queens)	Yes (Manhattan subway lines)	Yes (detonators for explosives built and most of the other materials acquired; plans to acquire rest of materials and finish assembling bombs)	3
U22	Failed	Arrested (after parked inert car bomb in front of the target building)	Yes (unnamed)	Yes (Federal Building in Springfield, IL)	Yes (but they were non-functioning ones provided by an undercover agent)	4
U23	Failed	Arrested (after parked inert car bomb in the parking garage of the target building)	None described (but there were 3 undercover agents involved)	Yes (skyscraper in Dallas housing 5 banks, including Wells Fargo)	Yes (but they were non-functioning ones provided by an undercover agent)	4
U24	Failed	Ineffective tradecraft (were unable to acquire semiautomatic weapons)	Yes (unnamed; became an informant after he knew Mehanna)	Yes (a shopping center - generally)	No	4
U25	Successful	N/A	None described	Yes (Fort Hood)	Yes	1
U26	Failed	Ineffective tradecraft (detonator just caused a fire, which passengers put out)	None described	Yes (NW Airlines flight from Amsterdam to Detroit)	Yes	2

Plot No.	AQ/Veteran Contacts	Affiliated Explosives Expert?	Strength of Affiliations
U01	Sajid Badat (another AQ operative); 'Ali 'Abd al-'Aziz 'Ali (aka, 'Ammar al-Baluchi, AQ operative who was 'communications intermediary' between Reid and Badat, KSM's nephew and Ramzi Yousef's cousin); KSM (claimed responsibility for the operation); Zacarias Moussaoui (close associate and beneficiary); Binyam Ahmed Muhammad (aka, Talha al-Kini, Foad Zouaoui, Taha al-Nigeri, John Samuel; attended explosives training camp in Kabul with Reid in Sep 2001); Ghulam Rama (French rep of LeT who "served as a compass on French territory" for Reid); Nizar Trabelsi (directed Reid and Badat in Amsterdam in Sep 2001; later convicted of planning attack on American base in Belgium); Abu Qatada (spiritual advisor of Islamic extremists in UK and overseas); Abu Hamza (aka, Mustafa Kamel Mustafa; preached at Finsbury Park Mosque)	Midhat Mursi (aka, Abu Khabab al-Masri, AQ's master bomb maker and chemical weapons expert who ran AQ's Derunta training camp)	Very Close
U02	Abu Hafis al-Masri (aka, Mohammed Atef, AQ military commander, Padilla's mentor in Afghanistan), Zayn al-Abidin Muhammad Husayn (aka, Abu Zubaydah, senior AQ commander, sent Padilla to KSM to present plot), Adnan Elshukrijumah (aka, Jafar al-Tayar, AQ operative, trained with Padilla), Binyam Ahmed Muhammad (aka, Talha al-Kini, Foad Zouaoui, Taha al-Nigeri, John Samuel; Padilla's accomplice for the dirty bomb and apartment plots), KSM (sent Padilla to US for apartment plot), Saif al-Adel (head of AQ's security committee, met Padilla and Binyam in Karachi), Ramzi Bin al-Shibh (AQ operative, 9/11 conspirator, trained Padilla), 'Ali 'Abd al-'Aziz 'Ali (aka, Ammar al-Baluchi, AQ operative, prepared Padilla for apartment plot)	Name unknown (referred to as "the explosives expert")	Very Close
U03	Alleged connection to the Islamic Group when he lived in Egypt	None	Distant
U04	UBL (met him at a training camp), a senior leader in AQ (Faris' Pakistani friend who "served a critical leadership role in providing supplies and materials" to AQ), Majid Khan (aka Yusif, Pakistani in the US who recommended Faris to KSM for an operation), Nuradin Abdi (co-conspirator on the mall plot), Christopher Paul (co-conspirator on the mall plot; had camping and martial arts training)	None	Close
U05	Sultan Jubran Sultan al-Qahtani (aka, Ali; second-in-command of an AQ cell in Medina), Ali Abd al-Rahman al-Faq'asi al-Ghamdi (aka, Adil; leader of the AQ cell in Medina), Mohammad Salem al-Ghamdi (aka, Majid; AQ member who trained Abu Ali on forgery), Umar al-Hakmi (AQ member who trained Abu Ali on fuses and wiring)	Ali Abd al-Rahman al-Faq'asi al-Ghamdi, Umar al-Hakmi	Very Close
U06	KSM (gave Barot guidance and claimed responsibility for the plots), Mohammed Neem Noor Khan (AQ communications specialist), Hambali (former leader of JI; Barot was sent to train with him by KSM)	None	Very Close (high-level connections but only a few)
U07	None	Osama Eldawood (Egyptian nuclear engineer)	Very Distant
U08	None	None	Very Distant
U09	None	None	Very Distant
U10	Aabid Hussein Khan (recruiter for LeT and other terrorist orgs), Younis Tsouli (put potential suicide bombers in contact with AQ recruiters) -- second degree connections at best	None	Distant
U11	Syrian AQ recruiter (met in 2003), Hassan Nabaat and Hany Shanti (in contact with Hammoud; arrested in Lebanon in Dec 2005 for belonging to AQ), "connection high up" in AQL, possibly even Zarqawi	None	Close (FBI Assistant Director John Miller: "It was a self-initiating foreign cell that had access to al-Qaeda's connections.")
U12	None	None	Very Distant
U13	Rashid Rauf (AQ operative, acted as liaison b/w UK cell and AQ in Pakistan; possible AQ contacts inc al-Masri, Amjad Hussein Farooqi, senior militant in Pakistan, Abu Faraj al-Libi, int'l operations planner; also connected previously to JeM), Abu Ubaidah al-Masri (senior AQ operational planner and explosives expert, suspected of masterminding plot), Abu Faraj al-Libbi (senior al-Qaeda operative, who allegedly met with Mohammad al-Ghabra, Ali's gym buddy, in Pakistan in 2002)	Abu Ubaidah al-Masri	Very Close

Plot No.	AQ/Veteran Contacts	Affiliated Explosives Expert?	Strength of Affiliations
U14	None	None	Very Distant
U15	None	Agron Abdullahu? (gave instructions at the shooting range; may have had experience fighting in Kosovo)	Very Distant
U16	Yasin Abu Bakr (leader of Jamaat al-Muslimeen, a Trinidad Muslim group; Nur and Kadir knew him personally), possible contacts with South American terrorists (through Kareem)	Unclear (“Individual A” and “Individual E” both suggested ways to blow up the fuel tanks but it is unclear whether they had the expertise to back it up)	Distant
U17	"AQ chiefs", Abu Yahya al-Libi (AQ leader and spokesman), Rashid Rauf (Pakistani British AQ operative), Moez Garsallaoui (Tunisian Islamic militant and leader of a French-Belgian cell), “a Taliban chief,” AQ's military chief in S Asia	None	Very Close
U18	None	None	Very Distant
U19	None described, but may have met some during his time in Yemen	None	Distant
U20	None described, but Boyd said to have fought in Afghanistan in the 1980s and attended camps in the 1990s	None	Distant
U21	Saleh al-Somali (AQ's chief of external operations; met him in Pakistan in 2008), Rashid Rauf (key AQ operative; met him in Pakistan in 2008), A third unnamed AQ leader (met him in Pakistan in 2008)	None	Close
U22	None	None	Very Distant
U23	None	None	Very Distant
U24	None	None	Very Distant
U25	Anwar al-Awlaki (radical American cleric who advised 2 9/11 operatives and Abdulmutallab, linked to AQAP)	None	Distant
U26	Anwar al-Awlaki (radical American cleric who advised 2 9/11 operatives and Maj. Hasan, linked to AQAP), unnamed AQ operatives/leaders in Yemen	Likely (unnamed AQ-affiliated bomb expert in Yemen said to have given Abdulmutallab the explosive)	Very Close

Plot No.	Type of Training	Explosives Training?	Strength of Training	Explosive Built or Acquired?	Criminal Background or Connections
U01	training camps (Khalden and Daruntag); on-the-job (scouting mission Jul-Aug 2001); mentors (al-Baluchi, Rama, Trabelsi); combat (fought in Afghanistan in 2001)	Yes	Strong	Unclear (most suspect Reid did not build it himself)	Yes (petty crime; in and out of prison in the 90s)
U02	training camp (al-Farooq), individual training (with "explosives expert" and al-Shibh), combat (in Afghanistan after US invasion), mentors (KSM, Zubaydah, Atef), online manual (to build dirty bomb)	Yes	Strong	No device	Yes (joined gang, convicted of murder and other crimes)
U03	unclear (none mentioned by authorities)	No	Weak	N/A	None
U04	training camp (unclear if he actually attended), online research (on blowtorches, ultra-light planes, Brooklyn Bridge)	Unclear	Intermediate	No device	None described
U05	mentors (training in weapons, explosives, and forgery by members of AQ cell in Medina)	Yes	Strong	No device	None described
U06	training camps (Pakistan, Afghanistan, Philippines, Kashmir, Malaysia), combat (may have fought in Kashmir), online and written manuals, on-the-job (very experienced in conducting reconnaissance), related experience (Bhatti, engineering; Ul-Haq, buildings)	Yes	Strong	No device	None described
U07	online manual	No	Weak	No device	Yes (Siraj arrested twice on assault charges)
U08	related experience (many robberies), community of practice (some firearms and physical training)	No	Weak/ Intermediate	N/A	Yes (James imprisoned for armed robbery, Washington imprisoned for assault with deadly weapon and robbery and was member of Rolling 60 Crips gang)
U09	online (bomb-making), community of practice (paintball practice)	No	Weak	No device	Yes (long rap sheet, inc attempted arson, disorderly conduct, breach of peace)
U10	online manuals/videos/research, community of practice (paintball paramilitary practice, physical training)	No	Weak	No device	None described
U11	community of practice (light weapons training at Pakistani refugee camp in southern Lebanon), online manual (advice from militant chat rooms)	No	Intermediate	No device	None (for Hammoud)
U12	community of practice (paintball paramilitary practice), related experience (Batiste had construction and detonation experience)	No (although Batiste may have had experience with explosives)	Weak	No device	Yes (Phanor in jail for firearms charge and had been jailed 6 times in 10 years; Abraham arrested for overstaying his visa)
U13	training camps (Rauf attended AQ camps in 1990s or later; 2 of London plotters likely trained with Masri sometime 2005-06; Ali may have had training in Pakistan in 2004)	Yes (suspected that 2 London plotters had explosives training in Pakistan, likely overseen by al-Masri)	Intermediate	Built (it had not been built yet but they had the required materials and had been experimenting)	Yes (Rauf wanted in UK in connection with 2002 murder), None mentioned for London plotters

Plot No.	Type of Training	Explosives Training?	Strength of Training	Explosive Built or Acquired?	Criminal Background or Connections
U14	community of practice (went to a shooting range once)	No	Weak	N/A	None described
U15	community of practice (shooting range, paintball)	No	Intermediate	N/A	Yes (all Dukas had been arrested for various conduct, drug, and traffic charges)
U16	unclear (none mentioned by authorities)	Unclear (Defreitas said he learned to make bombs in Guyana)	Weak	No device	Unclear (Nur was known to be involved with drugs)
U17	training camps (in FATA), combat (Afghanistan-Pakistan border)	Yes	Strong	No device	None
U18	unclear (none mentioned by authorities)	No	Weak	Acquired	Yes (all imprisoned at some point for drug, weapons, and/or assault charges)
U19	unclear (none mentioned by authorities)	No	Weak	N/A	Yes (charges for drugs, weapons, vehicle violations, and visa issues)
U20	training camps (Boyd in Afghanistan in 1990s), combat (Boyd in Afghanistan in 1980s, Sherifi in Kosovo in 2008), community of practice (Boyd, Serifi, and Zak practiced military tactics and use of weapons in NC)	Unclear (likely not)	Intermediate/Strong	N/A	Yes (Boyd charged with bank robbery and Hezb-e-Islami membership, Yaghi guilty of robbery, Hassan guilty of robbery, marijuana possession and assault, and Subasic charged with murder, extortion, and robbery in Bosnia)
U21	training camps (in FATA in 2008), mentor (person Zazi called for advice when he was assembling the detonators)	Yes	Strong	Built	None described
U22	manual (cookbook for explosives)		Weak	Acquired	Yes (jailed for aggravated robbery and battery; converted to Islam in prison)
U23	unclear (none mentioned by authorities)	No	Weak	Acquired	None described
U24	none mentioned (Abousamra traveled to Pakistan for training but was turned away)	No	Weak	N/A	None
U25	related experience (US military training)	Unclear	Weak	N/A	None described
U26	training camp (alleged to have trained with AQAP in Yemen b/w Sep and Dec 2009, unclear whether it was at a camp)	Unclear	Weak	No device	Unclear (Nur was known to be involved with drugs)

Plot No.	US Citizenship	Age on arrival in US	Tried and convicted?
U01	None	28? (Had he been to the US before the attack?)	Yes (Jan. 2003, life imprisonment and \$2-million fine for 8 charges inc. attempted murder)
U02	Citizen	US-born	Yes (Aug. 2007, 208 months in prison for conspiracy to murder, kidnap, and maim, and material support; never charged regarding the dirty bomb)
U03	Legal resident	31	No (Hadayet died during the attack)
U04	Naturalized citizen	25	Yes (Oct. 2003, 20 years for material support and providing info on possible US targets)
U05	Citizen	US-born	Yes (Mar. 2006, 30 years for material support, conspiracy to assassinate President of US, commit air piracy, and destroy aircraft)
U06	None	28	Yes, in UK (Nov. 2006, life sentence for conspiring to commit mass murder)
U07	Illegal (Siraj), Citizen? (Elshafay)	17 (Siraj), US-born? (Elshafay)	Yes (Jan. 2007, Siraj, 30 years for plotting to bomb a public transportation system; May 2007, Elshafay, 5 years for the same)
U08	Citizen (James, Patterson, Washington), Legal Resident (Samana)	US-born (James, Patterson, Washington), Unknown (Samana)	Yes (Jun. 2008, Washington, 22 years for conspiring to wage war against the US and weapons charge; Jul. 2008, Patterson, 151 months for same; Mar. 2009, James, 16 years for conspiring to wage war against US and oppose US gov authority by force; Aug. 2009, Samana, 70 months for conspiring to wage war on the US)
U09	Citizen	US-born	Yes (Nov. 2007, 30 years for attempting to provide material support to AQ and related charges)
U10	Naturalized citizen (Ahmed), Citizen (Sadequee)	12 (Ahmed), US-born (Sadequee)	Yes (Dec. 2009, 13 years for Ahmed for providing material support to terrorists, 17 years for Sadequee for providing material support to terrorists and a designated terrorist organization)
U11	None	Visited once in 2000(?)	Unclear (Jun. 2008, released on bail after 26 months in solitary, pending verdict from military court)
U12	Naturalized citizen (Lemorin), Illegal (Abraham), Citizen (Augustin, Augustine, Batiste, Phanor)	11 (Lemorin), unknown (Abraham), US-born (Augustin, Augustine, Batiste, Phanor)	Yes, some (May 2009, Batiste (Nov. 2009, 13.5 years), Abraham, Phanor, Augustin, and Augustine convicted of various charges inc conspiracy to provide material support, conspiracy to damage and destroy using explosives, and conspiracy to levy war against US government; Herrera and Lemorin acquitted)
U13	None	N/A	Yes, some (Sep. 2009, Ahmed Ali, Sarwar, Islam, and Tanvir Hussain sentenced to life for conspiracy to murder; Dec. 2009, Khatib for life for conspiracy to murder, Nabeel Hussain for 8 years for prep and assistance to act of terrorism, Uddin for 15 months for possessing records useful to terrorists), No (Dec. 2007, Rauf escaped Pakistani police after all terrorism charges dropped; Sep. 2009, Savant, Khan, Zaman, and Stewart-Whyte found not guilty of conspiracy to murder)

Plot No.	US Citizenship	Age on arrival in US	Tried and convicted?
U14	Citizen	US-born	Yes (Sep. 2008, 35 years for attempted use of a WMD)
U15	Naturalized citizen (Shnewer), Legal resident (Tatar, Abdullahu), Illegal (Dukas)	1,4,6 (Dukas), 16 (Abdullahu), Unknown (Shnewer, Tatar)	Yes (Mar. 2008, Abdullahu, 20 months for conspiring to provide firearms to illegal aliens; Apr. 2009, Dukas and Shnewer, life for conspiracy to murder members of US military, possession and attempted possession of machine guns, and other weapons charges; Apr. 2009, Tatar, 33 years for conspiracy to murder members of US military)
U16	Naturalized citizen (Defreitas), None (Ibrahim, Kadir, Nur)	Unknown (Defreitas), N/A (Ibrahim, Kadir, Nur)	Trial pending (Jun. 2008, all four pleaded not guilty; awaiting trial in NY)
U17	Citizen	US-born	Convicted (Jan. 2009 for conspiracy to kill US military personnel, material support to AQ, and receiving military-type AQ training), Sentence pending
U18	Citizen (Cromitie, David Williams, Onta Williams), Unknown (Payen)	US-born (Cromitie, David Williams, Onta Williams), Unknown (Payen)	Trial pending (charged with conspiracy and attempt to use WMD and anti-aircraft missiles, and conspiracy to kill officers and employees of the US)
U19	Citizen	US-born	Trial pending (wrote a letter to the judge saying that he wanted to plead guilty)
U20	Citizen (Boydx3, Hassan, Mohammad), Naturalized citizen (Subasic, Yaghi) Legal resident (Sherifi)	US-born (Boydx3, Hassan), Unknown for others	Trial pending (only Boyd and Sherifi charged with plotting the Quantico attack; others charged for planning jihad abroad, material support, and weapons charges)
U21	Legal resident	7	Sentence pending (Feb. 2010, pled guilty to bombing plot, conspiracy to murder outside US, and material support to AQ)
U22	Citizen	US-born	Trial pending (charged with attempted murder, and attempt to use WMD)
U23	Illegal	Not known	Trial pending (charged with attempting to use a WMD)
U24	Citizen	US-born	Never charged in relation to the plot
U25	Citizen	US-born	Trial pending (charged with murder and attempted murder)
U26	None	N/A	Trial pending (charged with attempted murder, trying to use a WMD, and 4 more terrorism-related charges; pleaded not guilty)

Plot No.	Case Name & Number	Notes
U01	USA v. Richard Reid (02-CR-10013-WGY)	None.
U02	USA v. Adham Amin Hassoun, Mohamed Hesham Youssef, Kifah Wael Jayyousi, Kassem Daher, Jose Padilla	None.
U03	N/A	There was a disagreement about whether to call the attack terrorism, since Hadayet was a lone actor and had personal as well as ideological motives, but after investigation, the FBI determined it to be a terrorist attack.
U04	USA v. Iyman Faris	None.
U05	USA v. Ahmed Omar Abu Ali (1:05CR53)	Abu Ali had joined an AQ cell in Medina.
U06	USA v. Dhiren Barot (05 Crim. 311)	Barot and accomplices did a lot of research and recon, and had very detailed plans. Also, there were a fair number of 'experts' in his cell (Bhatti, engineering; Ul-Haq, buildings)
U07	USA v. Shahawar Matin Siraj (07-0224-cr)	None.
U08	USA v. Kevin James, et al. (SA CR 05-214-CJC)	James founded Jamiyyat Ul-Islam Is-Saheeh (JIS) while in prison in 1997 and recruited Washington, who recruited the others. It was a well-planned plot according to FBI Assistant Director of Public Affairs John Miller: "I think if you look at the JIS case, of all of the terrorist plots since 9/11, it is probably the one that operationally was closest to actually occurring."
U09	USA v. Michael Curtis Reynolds (3:CR-05-493)	None.
U10	USA v. Syed Haris Ahmed and Ehsanul Islam Sadequee (1:06-CR-147-CC)	First example of a self-starter cell highly connected with other self-starters (look at NEFA report for more details on the connections). Also, unclear whether to classify this as a "jihad abroad" case. Terrorists were interested in committing jihad wherever they were needed once they had been trained, and seemed very determined in their attempts. US disrupted this plot early so there were less specific plans.
U11	N/A	DHS Sec says they disrupted the plot before the "fuse is lit" b/c short distance b/w planning and operational activity.
U12	USA v. Narseal Batiste, Patrick Abraham, Stanley Grant Phanor, Naudimar Herrera, Burson Augustin, Lyglenson Lemorin, and Rotschild Augustine (06-CR-20373)	Officials specifically mentioned that they are increasingly stopping plots as soon as they have enough information for a prosecution, so plots look more amateur than they might have been.
U13	N/A	None.

Plot No.	Case Name & Number	Notes
U14	USA v. Derrick Shareef (06 CR 919)	None.
U15	USA v. Mohamad Ibrahim Shnewer, Dritan Duka, Eljvir Duka, Shain Duka, Serdar Tatar, and Agron Abdullahu (07-459 (RBK))	None.
U16	USA v. Russell Defreitas, Kareem Ibrahim, Abdul Kadir, and Abdel Nur (CR 07 543)	Defreitas was a former employee at JFK, giving him insider knowledge. Also, Kadir was an engineer by education and training, so he understood that the tanks were double tanks and would need to explosions to blow them up.
U17	USA v. Bryant Neal Vinas (08-CR-823 (NGG))	None.
U18	USA v. James Cromitie, David Williams, Onta Williams, and Laguerre Payen (09 Cr 558)	Defense lawyers contended that Cromitie was entrapped.
U19	State of Arkansas v. Abdulakhim Mujah Muhammad (CR 2009-2626)	None.
U20	USA v. Daniel Patrick Boyd, Hysen Sherifi, Anes Subasic, Zakariya Boyd, Dylan Boyd, Mohammad Omar Aly Hassan, Ziyad Yaghi (5:09-CR-216-1-FL)	Although Boyd had chosen a target and acquired weapons, the plot has been classified as a level-3 seriousness because he does not appear to have done much planning or preparation for the attack. The weapons had been acquired for jihad abroad and the Quantico plot was more of an afterthought when jihad abroad proved impossible. In fact, I was unable to find any details about how Boyd planned to execute his plot.
U21	USA v. Najibullah Zazi (09-CR-663 (RJD)), and USA v. Zarein Ahmedzay, Adis Medunjanin (10-019 (S-1) (RJD))	CIA only became aware of Zazi in August 2009 and Federal agents did not begin watching him until early September. Zazi was able to train and plan for nearly a year before law enforcement became aware of his activities.
U22	USA v. Michael C. Finton (09-3048-M)	None.
U23	USA v. Hosam Maher Husein Smadi (3-09 CR 294-M)	None.
U24	USA v. Tarek Mehanna and Ahmad Abousamra (09-CR-10017-GAO)	The perpetrators made contact with gang members to try to acquire automatic weapons (an example of criminal connections being used for terrorist purposes). Also, the plot (which was started and abandoned in 2003) was not very advanced, but the perpetrators continued to be involved in terrorism, and one affiliate (Daniel Maldonado) succeeded in traveling abroad for training, and Mehanna provided material support to terrorists.
U25	USA v. Nidal Malik Hasan	None.
U26	USA v. Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab (2:10-cr-20005)	There is limited information on the specifics of Abdulmutallab's affiliations and training because it is an ongoing investigation. Limited media coverage since mid-February. Also, this is the first serious plot with connections to an AQ <i>affiliate</i> : "As the Christmas Day attempted bombing illustrates, the threats we face are becoming more diverse and more dangerous with each passing day. We not only face threats from al Qaeda, but also from self-directed groups not part of al Qaeda's formal structure which have ties to terrorist organizations through money or training," according to FBI Director Robert Mueller.

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