

Massive Police-Military Mobilization After New York City Bombing

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Tens of thousands of police and troops were mobilized across the New York metropolitan area Monday in the wake of Saturday night's bombing in the Chelsea district of Manhattan, which injured 29 people. A second explosive device was found four blocks from the first and disarmed without incident.

In the first such effort in US history, the New York Police Department effectively commandeered the entire telecommunications network, sending a message to every cellphone in the metropolitan area, to millions of people, with details of the suspect sought for planting the two bombs, Ahmad Khan Rahami.

The 28-year-old Afghan-American was arrested Monday morning after a local bar owner in Linden, New Jersey saw him sleeping in a doorway nearby and called police. Rahami was shot several times during what was described by police as an exchange of gunfire, before he was taken into custody. Two policemen were wounded, in addition to Rahami, but no one's wounds were life-threatening, officials said.

US counterterrorism agencies told the media that Rahami had not been under surveillance and had no known connections to an overseas terrorist organization, despite having travelled several times to Afghanistan in recent years, as well as to other countries. It is not clear how, given his family's precarious economic circumstances, he was able to do this.

Police now claim Rahami was responsible for four bomb-related incidents over the weekend. These include an attempted bombing Saturday morning of a charity 5k run in Seaside, New Jersey, about 80 miles south of New York City; the two bombs in Chelsea, one of which did not explode; and the depositing of five unexploded devices in a trash bin in Elizabeth, where they were found Sunday morning.

It is not known whether Rahami had assistance in the attacks, which could have killed dozens of innocent people. The amateurish character of the operation—bombs that did not go off, areas targeted without any political or social significance, no attempt to avoid surveillance cameras at the two Chelsea bomb sites, a broad trail of evidence leading directly to the perpetrator—suggest that the bomber was a disoriented individual, not a trained terrorist.

Rahami came to the US in 1995, at the age of seven, when his family sought refuge from the civil war raging in Afghanistan between rival US-backed Islamist militias, one of which, the Taliban, took power a year later.

The Rahami family appears to have had a difficult struggle as immigrants. They ran a chicken restaurant in Elizabeth, New Jersey, a working-class suburb of New York City, in which the father and many of his sons worked side-by-side. The father filed for bankruptcy at least once, and tried to make ends meet by keeping the restaurant open 24 hours a day, unusual for a family-run business.

Ahmad Rahami graduated from Edison High School and took classes for two years at a local community college, working towards a degree in criminal justice, but did not graduate. According to friends and acquaintances, he seemed completely Americanized, more interested in cars than religion. After a long trip to Afghanistan in 2012, however, he grew a beard, began wearing more traditional clothing and praying more frequently.

Rahami still gave no sign of political or religious radicalization, continuing to work at the family restaurant. He was arrested in 2014 on a domestic violence allegation, but charges were dropped. Other than that, his only recorded encounter with the police involved a traffic ticket.

Even ISIS, which has hailed as “soldiers” such disoriented supporters as the married couple who carried out the workplace massacre in San Bernardino, California, has not made a public claim of responsibility for Rahami’s actions, although it did claim “credit” for the knife attack by a Somali-American man in St. Cloud, Minnesota, Saturday. The difference may be that the St. Cloud attacker was shot to death, while Rahami remains alive and could well supply a different motivation for his alleged actions.

At a Monday afternoon press briefing after Rahami had been taken into custody, New York Mayor Bill de Blasio declared, “There is no other individual we are looking for.” FBI Assistant Director William Sweeney told the same news conference, “I have no indication that there’s a cell operating in the area.”

Nonetheless, de Blasio said that the biggest police-military mobilization in the city’s history would continue because of the arrival of dozens of heads of state and other foreign leaders for the United National General Assembly meetings this week. Over 1,000 New York state police and National Guard troops are supplementing the operations of 36,000 NYPD officers, who have been deployed in force throughout the city. “You should know you will see a very substantial NYPD presence this week—bigger than ever,” de Blasio said.

Whatever the connections between the Chelsea bombing and international terrorism, the two major-party candidates for president, Republican Donald Trump and Democrat Hillary Clinton, were quick to seize on the near-tragedy in Manhattan as an opportunity for militaristic posturing and mutual mudslinging.

Trump denounced immigrants and immigration as being responsible for the attacks because of “stupid” leaders who refused to close the borders of the US. In a 30-minute rant Monday morning on “Fox & Friends,” Trump denounced the modest increase in the number of refugees the Obama administration will admit to US, from 85,000 in the 2016 fiscal year to 110,000 in 2017.

Trump rejected the assessment by US counterterrorism agencies that the bombing in New York City was not organized from overseas. “I think there is many foreign connections,” he said. “I think this is one group. You have many, many groups because we’re allowing these people to come into our country and destroy our country and make it unsafe for people.” He

also lamented the fact that police were supposedly not allowed to use racial profiling against suspected terrorists.

Clinton, for her part, was less strident but equally reactionary. She suggested that Trump's proposed ban on Muslims entering the US undermined US military operations in the Middle East, which depend on the collaboration of Muslim allies like Saudi Arabia.

She cited a series of former intelligence and counterterrorism officials who have attacked Trump, and in some cases endorsed her, as a more effective "commander-in-chief" for American imperialism. Trump was doing the work of ISIS, she said. "They are looking to make this into a war against Islam, rather than a war against jihadists, violent terrorists," she claimed, adding, "The kinds of rhetoric and language Mr. Trump has used is giving aid and comfort to our adversaries."

Both candidates, and the corporate-controlled parties they represent, have no answer to the downward spiral of war and destruction in the Middle East except more war and more destruction, which will inevitably create the conditions for more terrorist attacks within the US, whether by operatives of groups like ISIS and Al Qaeda, or disoriented individuals like the would-be Chelsea bomber.

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