The infrequency of major successful terrorist attacks

Gordon Woo

Terrorism insurance in 2010: where do we stand?
IRA Campaign in Northern Ireland

Four out of five attempted IRA attacks were interrupted by security forces.

Chief Constable of Royal Ulster Constabulary; confirmed by Stella Rimington, Director-General of MI5

A senior member of the provisional IRA stated that around nine out of ten operations were not carried out due to security force activities.
U.S. Embassy, Via Veneto, Rome:
Target of one of more than sixty attempted terrorist attacks against North America and Western Europe since 9/11 which have been prevented.
Post 9/11 Western Alliance homeland major Jihadi plots evading interdiction

- Miami aviation: December 22, 2001
- Madrid rail: March 11, 2004
- London subway/bus: July 7, 2005
- London subway: July 21, 2005
- London nightclub - Glasgow airport: June 29 - 30, 2007
- Detroit aviation: December 25, 2009
- Time Square: May 1, 2010
Operation Rhyme: US & UK attacks

- Dhiren Barot’s U.S. targets included the World Bank headquarters and the International Monetary Fund, both in Washington, the Citigroup buildings in New York and the Prudential building in Newark, New Jersey.

- Reconnaissance was also carried out on top London hotels.

- Ambitious terrorist plots capable of causing maximal loss require a significant number of operatives for surveillance, weapon development, security evasion, driving, etc.
Mohammed Naveed Bhatti, an engineer who researched bomb-making, provided Barot with access to his garage to store terror plans as well as false documents.

Junade Feroze, was a driver, who led counter-surveillance checks. He owned a garage, and could dispose of cars and obtain both tyres and gas canisters for attacks.

Zia Ul Haq had a degree in architecture, and provided Barot with information on how to precipitate structural collapse. He also helped in creating false identities.

Abdul Aziz Jalil, Barot’s minder, rented a safe house for Barot where planning material was kept. He assisted with research into radioactivity.

Omar Rehman, studied information design and was tasked with disabling fire and security systems. At his home were plans of a security system and diagrams showing the position of security guards.

Qaisar Shaffi accompanied Barot for US reconnaissance. At his home the police were printed pages from the Terrorist Handbook, with references to chemicals and explosives included.

Nadim Tarmohamed undertook US reconnaissance. A computer account in Tarmohamed’s name was used to save the plans for the attacks on the IMF, New York Stock Exchange and Prudential Buildings.
The closeness of terrorist networks

“Six degrees of separation between us and everyone else on this planet. The President of the United States, a gondolier in Venice, just fill in the names.

I find it extremely comforting that we're so close.”

...but not for conspirators!
Through a National Security Agency telephone intercept, the CIA knew of a meeting in Malaysia in January 2000, involving the two Saudis: Nawaf Al Hazmi and Khalid Al Midhar

.....later to hijack Flight AA 77 on 9/11.
Detecting Missing Links

Zacharias Moussaoui

DST: Direction de la Surveillance de la Territoire

Ibn Khattab Chechnyan Mujahideen

Yazid Sufaat

Infocus Tech. (Malaysia)

Kuala Lumpur Condo

Nawaf Al Hamzi

Khalid Al Midhar

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All nineteen 9/11 hijackers were within 2 degrees of separation from the two original suspects uncovered in 2000.
1 degree of separation: Madrid  March 11, 2004

Jamal Zougam

Address book

Phone number

David Courtailleur

Abu Dahdah
Head of Spanish cell
“Analysts start with a suspect and spider-web outward, looking at everyone he contacts, and everyone those people contact, until the list includes thousands of names.

Before individuals are actually wiretapped, computers sort through flows of meta-data, information about who is contacting whom by phone or e-mail.”

Ex-NSA staff member

On December 15, 2005, the New York Times disclosed that the National Security Agency taps phone calls to or from USA, if one party is believed to be linked with Al Qaeda.
Spanning the webs of known terrorists

The aggregated webs of known terrorists close in on any operatives planning new attacks against western alliance homelands.
Gaining an entry-point into a cell

External links to community sympathizers
‘The Cream of the Cream of the Cream’

‘A small group: they are the ones who carry convictions for this religion.

An even smaller group are the ones who flee from this worldly life in order to act upon these convictions.

And an even smaller group from this elite group are the ones who sacrifice their souls and their blood.’

Abdullah Azzam
Martyrs: The Building Blocks of Nations
Communication Intercept
Kazi Rahman was arrested in November 2005 after trying to buy three Uzi sub-machine guns from an MI5 agent, posing as ‘Mohamed’.

This purchase was intended to be followed by others, including a Sam-7 missile and Rocket-Propelled-Grenades."

He pleaded guilty and was jailed for nine years but details were kept secret because of his links to the 7/7 bombers, who were due to face trial later.

He had attended a fund-raising party held by Al Muhajiroun, along with Khyam and the 7/7 bombers.
Monitoring Jihadi websites

- Almost all U.S. intelligence agencies, the Pentagon and the National Security Agency monitor 15,000 Jihadi forums with a large number of Arabic-speaking agents. Likewise, Israel has many Arabic-speaking agents tracking Jihadi forums.

- The secret services of seven Arab countries have a permanent presence in Jihadi forums. Some of these intelligence agents are prominent members of the forums and specialists in Shari’a. The countries intruding on Jihadi Forums are Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and the Palestinian National Authority.

- Intelligence agent postings are provocatively worded to lure potential terrorists.
Canadian Mubin Shaikh befriended men who were plotting truck bombs in the downtown area of Toronto.

He first approached the Canadian Intelligence Service (CSIS) when a childhood friend was arrested in relation to a major British plot.

He was tasked by CSIS with befriending a group that spies had been monitoring in extremist internet chatrooms.

Zakaria Amara, one of the key figures in a conspiracy to set off three truck bombs in eastern Canada, was sentenced to life imprisonment on January 18, 2010.
Post 9/11 rise in MI5 staff numbers
MI5 surveillance of suspected plotters

- As of November 2007, MI5 were keeping under constant surveillance 2000 people directly connected to Islamist terrorist plots. According to the head, Jonathan Evans, countless more are involved in fundraising, helping people to travel to Afghanistan, Pakistan and Somalia. Sometimes they provide equipment, support and propaganda.

- The Security Service currently employs around 3,500 people, most of whom are engaged in counter-terrorism.

- There are 1350 British mosques, of which half are aligned with the conservative Deobandi sect of Islam.

- Apart from the 2000 under surveillance, another 1000 Jihadi sympathizers might be informants or intelligence agents.
Surveillance statistics

- From opinion polls, the number of adult Muslims in UK, condoning terrorism, is estimated at about 60,000.
- The chance that an external contact of a terrorist is dangerous for a plot is estimated to be \( \frac{(2000+1000)}{60,000} = \frac{1}{20} \).
- MI5 has admitted that, prior to the July 7, 2005, bombings, they could properly track only 1/20 of the people it connected with terrorist cells.
- This chance of 1/20 that an external contact is dangerous seems to be quite widely relevant. For example, this is approximately the ratio of the combined number of people on the no-fly [4,000] and selectee lists [14,000] to the 400,000 in the TSDB (Terrorist Screening Data Base). [Those who only associate with known or suspected terrorists are ineligible for the No Fly or Selectee Lists.]
External links with the supportive community

Extended Family

Relatives in Various Countries

Muslim Organizations

Mosques, Islamic societies, Islamic stores, clubs etc.

Virtual Islamic World

Emails, Jihadi Forums, Blogs etc.
From 9/11 to the end of 2009, in UK there were **1,759** terrorism arrests, leading to **223** convictions.

Dr. Mohammed Asha, acquitted of involvement in the June 2007 doctors’ attack on London & Glasgow.
Consider a plot involving $N$ Jihadi operatives.
Each operative will have a number of contacts within the supportive community. This may involve communicating with individuals by phone, email, post or meeting, or accessing Jihadi forums.
For a cell of $N$ operatives, the number of external contacts is assumed to be in the general range from $3N$ to $10N$.
Through indiscretion, each may provide an entry point into a plot network. The probability that a conspiracy is not compromised is the product of the likelihood of non-discovery by any external contact.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cell Size</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plot</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interdiction Probability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
## Relative frequency of vehicle bomb sizes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bomb Size</th>
<th>Rel. Freq.</th>
<th>Cell Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bomb - 600 lb.</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>Two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bomb - 1 Ton</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>Six</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bomb - 2 Ton</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>Eight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bomb - 5 Ton</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>Nine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bomb -10 Ton</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>Ten</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on Logistical Burden & Interdiction, and is close to global vehicle bomb experience: 6% for 1 ton bombs, and 1.5% for 2 ton bombs.
An aviation explosives plot requires fewer operatives than taking control of a plane and flying it into a building.
Rapid tracking of the Time Square bomber

FBI agents turned up a telephone number, *but no name*, in connection with Faisal Shahzad's purchase of a Nissan Pathfinder.

Agents searched databases containing the telephone numbers called by or to that disposable cell phone.

They found a number given by Shahzad to Customs and Border Protection, when he was screened on US entry in February 3rd.
Too many terrorists spoil the plots

- An excessive number of operatives involved in attack planning, increases the chance that an external link may compromise the operation, and lead to it being interdicted.
- In the past few years, the only successful Jihadi terrorist attacks in countries with high security have involved a modest number of operatives.
- Large plots involving many operatives have been interdicted.

‘The biggest threat is not so much that we face an attack like 9/11. The security services may be faced with simple rather than complex terror plots and devices in the near future.’

Leon Panetta, Director CIA  
February 2, 2010
RMS risk modelling of the terrorism pools

- The progress in understanding terrorism risk since 9/11 has enabled RMS to model the terrorism risk pools.
- Modelling should be recognized as an integral part of informed and responsible terrorism pool risk management.
- As with all catastrophe risk modelling, effort to improve the quality of exposure data is very worthwhile.