

# Plan to attack New York tunnels: Yet another dubious “terror plot”

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New Yorkers awoke Friday morning to lurid headlines in the *New York Daily News* proclaiming that a “Tunnel Bomb Plot” had been foiled. That afternoon, Federal Bureau of Investigation Assistant Director Mark Mershon, flanked by Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Police Commissioner Raymond Kelly, told a press conference that the FBI had disrupted a plan to carry out suicide bombings in the PATH train tunnels that carry hundreds of thousands of commuters between Manhattan and New Jersey.

The alleged mastermind, a 31-year-old resident of Beirut, Lebanon named Assem Hammoud, was being held in Beirut and had, according to the FBI, confessed to participating in the plot and acting on the orders of Osama bin Laden. There were a total of eight suspects, two of whom were in custody at unnamed locations. None were Americans and none had set foot on US soil.

Mershon said six foreign governments, which he did not name, were cooperating in the investigation. “We believe,” he declared, “we intercepted the group early in their plotting and, in fact, the plan has largely been disrupted.”

Just how early could be gleaned from his assertion that the “plotting for this attack had matured to a point where it appeared that the individuals were about to move forward. They were about to go to a phase where they would attempt to surveil the targets, establish a regimen of attack and acquire the resources necessary to effectuate the attacks.”

Mershon refused to answer questions on any other details of the purported plot, other than to say the conspirators hoped to carry out the attack in October or November of this year. Perhaps sensing skepticism even among the press, he added that this was “the real deal.”

How real a plot could be, in which the conspirators had not scouted the supposed targets, had not attempted to raise funds or acquire explosives, and had not formulated a plan of action, Mershon failed to explain.

Further information reported in press accounts and attributed to US officials “speaking on condition of anonymity because the investigation is ongoing” made it clear that no real plot existed. An Associated Press dispatch reported:

“In the latest case, a federal official said FBI agents monitoring Internet chat rooms used by extremists learned of the plot in recent months and determined that tunnels were possibly being targeted after investigators pieced together code words from their conversations.

“Another US official also speaking on condition of anonymity because the investigation is ongoing called the plot ‘largely aspirational’ and described the Internet conversations as mostly extremists discussing and conceptualizing the plot. The official said no money had been transferred, nor had other similar operational steps been taken.”

Thus the only evidence of a plot was decoded, or perhaps concocted, from written conversations—that is, entirely from words, not deeds.

Another federal law enforcement official, also speaking on condition of anonymity, told the press that the plotters’ goal was to unleash a major flood on Wall Street by bombing the PATH tunnels, which run beneath the Hudson River. But other unidentified counterterrorism officials pointed to the absurdity of such a plan, since the tunnels are below ground and protected by bedrock, concrete and steel.

Even Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff, speaking in Boston, acknowledged that the plot did not pose an imminent threat. And earlier in the day, a statement issued jointly by the FBI and the Department

of Homeland Security flatly contradicted the lurid claims made later by Mershon at his press conference.

While Mershon described a plot masterminded by an operative of bin Laden to attack New York, the FBI-Homeland Security statement said there was “no specific or credible information that Al Qaeda is planning an attack on US soil.”

As for the alleged mastermind Assem Hammoud, his family denied any Al Qaeda links and his mother said Hammoud taught economics at a local university. “His morale is high because he is confident he is innocent,” she said.

Despite the flimsy, internally contradictory and fantastic character of the purported plot to blow up New York tunnels, leading politicians from both parties immediately and uncritically accepted the government’s claims.

New York Senator Charles Schumer, a Democrat, said, “This is one instance where intelligence was on top of its game and discovered the plot when it was just in the talking phase.” His only negative comment had to do with the distribution of federal Homeland Security funds. Echoing Republican Mayor Bloomberg, Schumer said the foiled plot showed “how misguided” the Homeland Security Department’s decision not to give New York a greater share of the total budget was.

The mass media, as with every previous and equally dubious “terror plot,” swung into action, uncritically reporting the government’s claims as fact, and doing so in a sensationalist manner designed to generate the maximum alarm and fear. All three of the broadcast networks led their evening news reports with the “New York tunnel plot,” underlining its dire meaning by noting that its exposure coincided with the one-year anniversary of the London subway bombings.

Just two weeks before, the FBI had announced the arrest of seven residents of the impoverished Liberty City neighborhood of Miami in what was billed as the biggest terror plot since 9/11. Within a day, however, the smell of provocation had become so great that even the media felt obliged to drop the story.

It turned out that the seven men had been ensnared in a bogus plot concocted by an undercover FBI agent provocateur. They had been targeted for entrapment, and, as in the present “tunnel plot,” had done nothing more than talk. That too was an “aspirational” plot.

The pattern could not be more clear. The government,

with the full support of the “opposition” Democrats and the complicity of the media, announces at regular intervals terror plots—either nonexistent or contrived by agents of the government itself—in order to keep the American people in a constant state of fear and confusion, the better to wage war abroad and lay siege to democratic rights at home.



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