

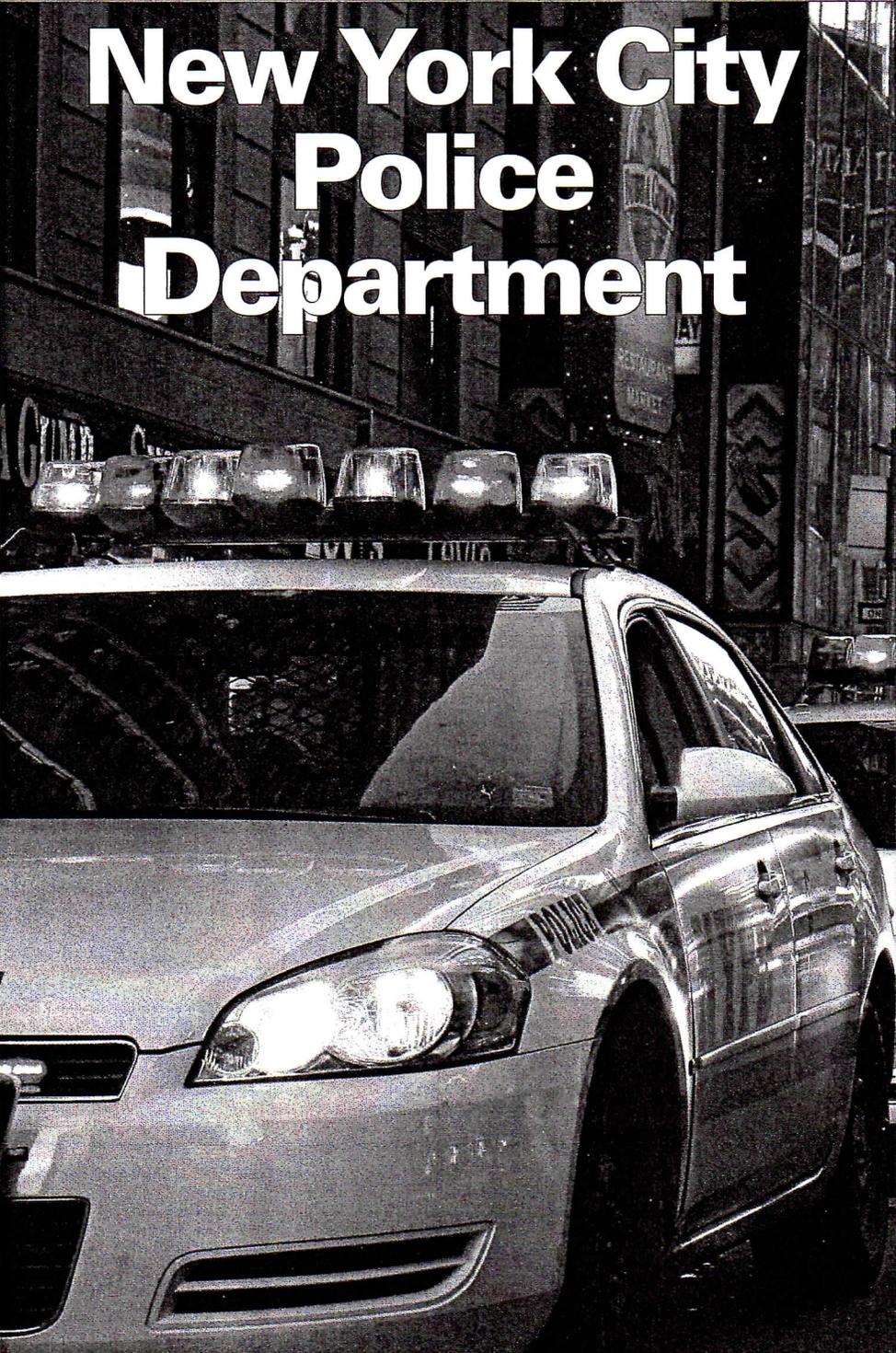


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10 Years after 9/11:  
Lessons Learned by the

# New York City Police Department



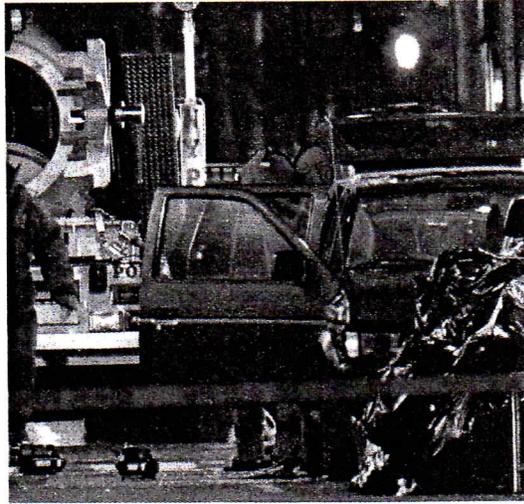
By Raymond W. Kelly,  
Police Commissioner,  
City of New York

Since 9/11, terrorists have targeted New York City 13 times with plots against the New York Stock Exchange, Citigroup headquarters, the Brooklyn Bridge, John F. Kennedy International Airport, Times Square, New York's Ground Zero, the subway system, major synagogues, and other sites. The most important lesson the New York City Police Department (NYPD) has learned during the past 10 years is the most obvious one: New York City, the world's financial and communications capital, remains in the crosshairs of global terrorism.

The threat we face today is extremely complex. It is homegrown, and it is international. It involves informal networks of aspiring radicals, as well as organized entities with funds, training camps, and media savvy. We have to guard against all of it.

While the death of Osama bin Laden was a welcome milestone, it certainly does not spell the end of al Qaeda. We have to assume that among bin Laden's disciples are those who would like nothing better than to avenge his death by striking New York again. Indeed, they have been targeting us persistently since 9/11, plotting to bomb the Port Authority Trans-Hudson (PATH) commuter train tunnels between New York and New Jersey and the retaining wall at Ground Zero, to release cyanide gas in the subway system, and to bomb three subway trains in Manhattan.<sup>1</sup>

We are equally concerned about homegrown attacks. Six of the thirteen plots against us since 9/11 have involved citizens or residents of the United States. We made arrests in the most recent case 10 days after bin Laden's death. On May 11, 2011, the NYPD Intelligence Division arrested two Queens, New York, residents who had conspired to bomb a synagogue in



Manhattan. They had also expressed interest in bombing the Empire State Building. Ahmed Ferhani and Mohammed Mehdi Mamdouh were taken into custody after Ferhani purchased two Browning semi-automatic pistols, a Smith and Wesson handgun, ammunition, and a hand grenade from undercover officers. Just before he was apprehended, Ferhani said he wanted to obtain more handguns, silencers, and a box of grenades, as well as bullet-resistant vests and police radios.<sup>2</sup>



The NYPD has attempted to build the kind of deterrent needed to defeat both homegrown threats and those that originate abroad. At the same time, our police officers have not relented in their fight against crime, which has fallen every year since 2001 and by nearly 40 percent overall. Because of budget cuts after 9/11 and the recent financial crisis, we have been operating with 6,000 fewer officers than we had in 2001. We are fighting both crime and terrorism at a time when our resources are fewer than they have been in a very long time. Every aspect of our counterterrorism program reflects this reality.

In January 2002, we became the first police department in the country to develop our own counterterrorism bureau. We established a division within this bureau responsible for training and equipping every one of our 35,000 police officers for counterterrorism duties.

We also restructured our intelligence division, which prior to 9/11 was mainly

tasked with protecting visiting dignitaries. We removed the division from its place within the detective bureau; the intelligence division now reports directly to the police commissioner. We also gave the division a new, international focus. While it continues to coordinate the protection of diplomats and world leaders, its primary mission is to gather and analyze global intelligence.

To help guide our counterterrorism bureau and intelligence division, we turned to leaders from outside the police department with deep federal and international experience. Over the years, the caliber of people we have been able to attract has

played a major role in our ability to protect New York. In addition, we have hired civilian intelligence analysts who are experts in military intelligence and foreign affairs. They study terrorist groups, regions of the world about which we are concerned, and methods of attack.

Our intelligence gathering is greatly supported by our having senior NYPD officers assigned as liaisons to police and intelligence agencies in 11 locations around the world: London, England; Madrid, Spain; Paris, France; Tel Aviv, Israel; Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates; Amman, Jordan; Lyons, France; Montreal,

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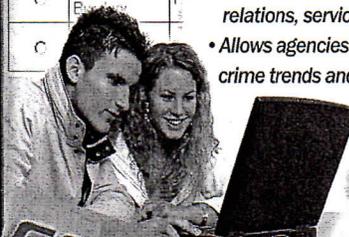
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Quebec, Canada; Toronto, Ontario, Canada; the Republic of Singapore; and Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. From these sites, our liaisons can easily travel to the scenes of terrorist attacks that occur throughout Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. They do not participate in any formal government investigations that take place outside of the United States. Instead, they seek to learn practical lessons from terrorist activity. With every major attack or conspiracy, they look at the specific tactics used, the type of weaponry and explosives involved, where the planning was conducted, and the nature of the targets. We want to gather every conceivable detail in order to learn how best to defend New York City against a similar attack. We ask all of our liaisons to ask themselves how the lessons learned from this attack can be applied to New York City.

In some cities, our work is facilitated by having liaisons fluent in the language of the countries where they are serving. The NYPD is fortunate to have a wide variety of bilingual officers. This is a direct result of one of our most important organizational strengths: the remarkable diversity in our ranks.



Now more ever, the makeup of the police department reflects the diversity of New York City, where 36 percent of the population is foreign-born. Since 2002, we have made

a concerted effort to tap into this resource by recruiting more officers from minority and immigrant communities.

These efforts have been very fruitful. Whereas the uniformed ranks of the NYPD were once primarily comprised of white officers, today our recruit classes are typically "majority-minority"—that is, more African American, Hispanic, and Asian officers than white officers. In 2006, for the first time, the rank of police officer became majority-minority. Since that time, we have hired officers born in 88 different countries and representing dozens of ethnicities, nationalities, and faiths.

In addition to helping us work well with the communities we serve, this emphasis on diversity has allowed us to build a foreign linguist program with more than 800 registered speakers of 60 different languages, including Arabic, Urdu, Pashto, Farsi, Russian, Mandarin, and Spanish. Beyond our linguist program, we have thousands more bilingual police officers and civilians working in every part of the city.

We have cast a wide net for collaboration, partnering with the federal government, regional law enforcement agencies, and the private sector. On 9/11, there were just 17 NYPD detectives serving on New York City's

Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF) with the FBI. In 2002, we increased that number to more than 120. Since that time, the JTTF has functioned as our chief conduit for receiving intelligence developed overseas about terrorist plots related to New York.

We also share information with 100 law enforcement agencies throughout the Northeast in a program called Operation Sentry. We do this knowing that it is often easier for terrorists to develop a plot outside the target area. For example, the plan to bomb the World Trade Center in 1993 was hatched across the Hudson River in New Jersey. And the suicide bombers that struck the London transit system in 2005 built their bombs in the city of Leeds, 180 miles north of the target.

Following the London attacks, the NYPD convened the NYPD-Amtrak Northeast Corridor Coalition, a public-sector partnership made up of law enforcement agencies along Amtrak's Northeast Corridor. The purpose of the coalition is to bolster security and improve cooperation along the rail route, which is one of the most sensitive and heavily traveled in the nation. We know transit systems nationwide are a vulnerable target. Indeed, among the wealth of data recovered from bin Laden's compound in Pakistan were handwritten notes proposing to derail a train on the 10th anniversary of 9/11 or another significant date.

In an unprecedented initiative supported by the Department of Homeland Security, we are posting radiation detection equipment throughout neighboring jurisdictions and at key points of entry into the five boroughs so that the city is, in effect, ringed with an alarm system. This program, Securing the Cities, includes 150 law



enforcement agencies in dozens of nearby cities and towns.

When it comes to the private sector, we collaborate with 7,500 members of the region's private security industry, sharing



information and training through a program called NYPD Shield. Under another initiative, Operation Nexus, detectives make thousands of visits to the types of businesses that might be exploited by terrorists: truck rental outfits, fertilizer stores, and chemical supply companies. We ask employees of these businesses to contact us if they see anything unusual or anything that gives them pause.

We also partner with the private sector to secure areas of the city known to be coveted by terrorists. Through our Lower and Midtown Manhattan Security Initiatives, private companies have given us access to the feeds from their surveillance cameras. Combined with our own network of public cameras, we have detailed coverage of street activity in Manhattan south of Canal Street and from 30th Street to 60th Street. The cameras operate on a single, centralized network. This makes it possible for us to scan recorded footage for specific objects and colors. If we are looking for a man in a red jacket, we can call up all the red jackets filmed in the last 30 days. We can also program the system to alert us to potentially suspicious scenarios: a bag left unattended, a car driving against the flow of traffic, or a person walking through a restricted area. We can view the footage from any camera remotely from our coordination center. This center is staffed 24 hours a day by police officers and representatives from our private and public sector partners. It also serves as the integration point not only for video but for a variety of data sources, including license plate readers and radiation detectors.

Across the city, we have distributed more than 2,500 radiation pagers to patrol officers. We also have highly sensitive detection equipment on the boats we use to patrol New York Harbor and in police vehicles. Our officers use a truck-based radiation sensor capable of detecting not only the presence of alpha and gamma radiation but also the particular isotope in a passing car.

Every day, based on the intelligence, we deploy teams of heavily armed officers to make sudden, unannounced visits to iconic locations. We are constantly looking to disrupt surveillance to let any would-be terrorist know that the police are watching all the



time, everywhere. We stage a daily surge of as many as 100 patrol cars that proceed in formation and with lights flashing to a pre-arranged location.

We also place particular emphasis on the subway system. Five million New Yorkers use the subways every day. Protecting this system is one of our top priorities and greatest challenges. This is because the entire system is designed to be open. Its very strengths as a mass transit system leave it vulnerable to attack.

After the bombing of the London transit system in 2005, we began searching the bags and backpacks of subway passengers. We also inspect all 14 underwater subway tunnels daily. We have heightened uniformed patrols underground, and we conduct regular security sweeps of subway cars.

These are some of the tools we are using to keep pace with the evolving threat of terrorism. The philosophy behind them is sim-

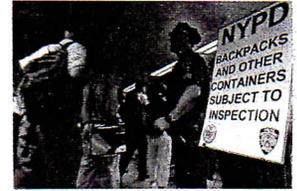
ple. We have to develop the best intelligence available, expand our partnerships, and take protective measures to defeat whatever our enemies might be planning next.

Fortunately for local U.S. law enforcement agencies, there are encouraging signs of support from all three branches of federal government—the judicial, the executive, and the legislative—for the growing responsibility borne by municipalities in defending the United States. This could not come at a better time, with police departments across the nation contending with difficult budget cuts and the necessity of doing more with less.

One example is a precedent-setting legal decision rendered in 2010 by the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit. The appeals court vacated an order by a lower court that the NYPD hand over field reports made by undercover officers as they prepared to secure the city during the Republican National Convention in 2004. Doing so would have revealed both the methods we used and the identities of our officers. In a 43-page decision, the court reasoned that the plaintiff's need for the reports did not outweigh the public's interest in preserving the integrity of our undercover operations and thus protected our documents under the doctrine of law enforcement privilege. In applying that doctrine, the court relied upon

and clarified earlier precedents involving federal agencies such as the Central Intelligence Agency and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. As a result, it is clear that the legal protection for our sensitive documents will be just as strong as that given to the federal agencies. This is critical because covert operations may be the only effective way to identify homegrown terrorists who are often living here legally and operating alone or with just one or two accomplices.

Another example is the ongoing, bipartisan effort in Washington, D.C., between the White House and Congress for the establishment of a public safety nationwide, interoperable, wireless broadband network. We in law enforcement all recognize the need for this network. Our existing communications systems are fast becoming obsolete. We rely principally on the use of two-way voice radios to communicate with responding officers and direct them to a scene. However, this technology is extremely limited. We cannot use it to exchange electronic data. And although we have made progress on local radio interoperability, the lack of a common radio spectrum prevents us from establish-

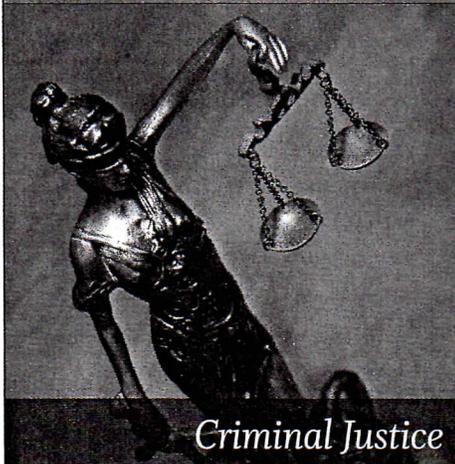


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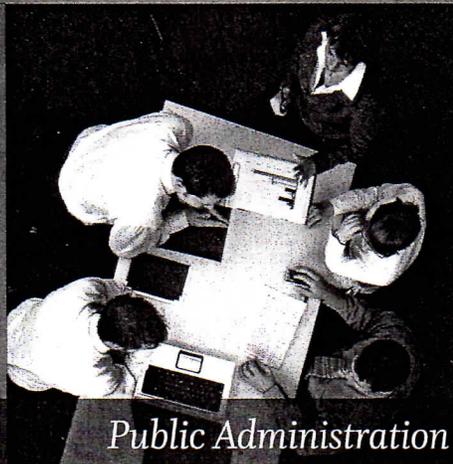
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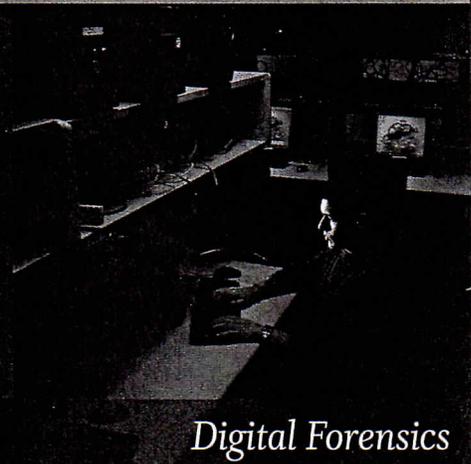
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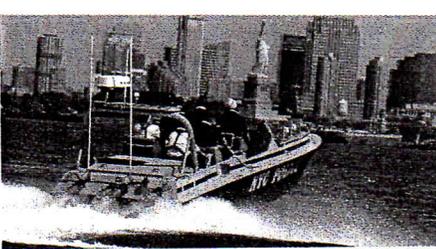
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ing a truly seamless nationwide system for all first responders. Given the technology that is available, and the complexity of the threat we face, this communication barrier is unacceptable. Together with our partners from across the country, the NYPD looks forward to the day when we can share a broadband capability that delivers voice, video, and data on a dedicated wireless network.

We face a powerful ideological movement that is constantly shifting. Those who would attack us are resilient. They are building new alliances and finding new recruits at an alarming rate. Last year, when Faisal Shahzad pleaded guilty to leaving a car bomb in Times Square, he said he picked a Saturday night in order to kill and injure as many people as possible. He could not have put it more plainly when he said, "it's a war." He also referred to the attack he was planning as an attack on America.<sup>3</sup> If the NYPD's intelligence program has taught us anything, it is that there are others living among us who share Shahzad's beliefs and aspirations. We have no choice but to match them step for step, to collaborate widely and with the most advanced tools possible, in order to prevail. I am confident we can and we will. ♦

**Notes:**

<sup>1</sup>Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), "Lebanese-U.S. Government Cooperate and Disrupt Plan to N.Y.-N.J. Transportation System," press release, July 7, 2006, <http://www.fbi.gov/news/pressrel/press-releases/lebanese-us-government-cooperate-and-disrupt-plan-to-ny-nj-transportation-system>; Bill Martin, "FBI Thwart Tunnel Terror Blitz," *Daily Star*, July 8, 2006; Shirley Hung and Nicole Jackson, "Report: Al Qaeda Planned N.Y. Subway Attack," CNN.com, June 18, 2006, <http://edition.cnn.com/2006/US/06/17/subway-plot/index.html>; and Janon Fisher, "Qaeda Rant of Bomb Zombie: NYer Cops to Subway Plot amid Hate Spew," *New York Post*, April 24, 2010, [http://www.nypost.com/p/news/local/brooklyn/qaeda\\_rant\\_haqTYT8ejRYS2N6LhCQwhP](http://www.nypost.com/p/news/local/brooklyn/qaeda_rant_haqTYT8ejRYS2N6LhCQwhP) (all accessed June 29, 2011).

<sup>2</sup>Tom Hays, "NYC Terror Suspects Were Lone Wolves, Surveilled for Months," *The Huffington Post*.com, May 13, 2011, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/05/13/nyc-terror-suspects-were\\_n\\_861486.html?view=print](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/05/13/nyc-terror-suspects-were_n_861486.html?view=print) (accessed June 30, 2011).

<sup>3</sup>Jerry Markon, "Shahzad Pleads Guilty in Failed Times Square Bombing, Warns of Future Attacks," *Washington Post*, June 22, 2010, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/06/21/AR2010062102468.html> (accessed June 30, 2011).

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