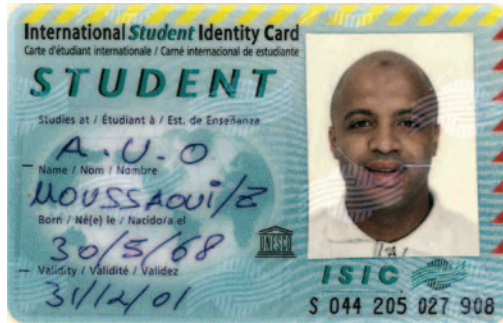


FBI agent in Minnesota who asked for permission to search Moussaoui's computer because he was "trying to stop someone from taking an airplane and crashing it into the World Trade Center," was turned down. The computer is believed to have contained enough information for the government to have connected the strange actions of the arrested Muslim immigrant with a plan by Al-Qaeda to use airplanes as weapons of terror.

In light of all the information and hints that did reach American officials, it is fair to say that Al-Qaeda was taking a very wild gamble that its broad and intricate plot would go unnoticed and unimpeded by American security officials—hardly the image of a wily and cunning foe that the media cultivated.

Yet, this image persists, even in the media, which one would think should know better. Among other problems, the false image of Al-Qaeda's effectiveness greatly encourages the organization's efforts to recruit new followers and supporters, and to induct new trainees into its terror programs. Few people are interested in changing the course of their lives by joining a group that displays steady ineptitude, and the media descriptions of Al-Qaeda's effectiveness



Zacarias Moussaoui blew his cover and was arrested by the FBI after asking too many obvious questions in flight school.

create a false aura that makes it appealing for would-be Islamic terrorists to join.

A more accurate image of Al-Qaeda could do much to advance Western interests. Adjusting the perceived reality of Al-Qaeda's professionalism would also enable America's security agencies to better target the terrorists. It would shift the focus from exclusively tracking the terror paths of success to include terrorists who are amateurs yet who—despite their significant shortcomings—present some danger to Americans.

By all accounts, the United States has forced Al-Qaeda to retreat several years' worth of advances, and in all likelihood, America has delivered a permanent blow to the organization's ability to plan and carry out serious terror attacks against Western targets. It is now estimated that fully two-thirds of Al-Qaeda's leadership was captured or destroyed, including mastermind of the 9/11 attacks, Khalid Sheik Mohammed. According to American intelligence estimates, Al-Qaeda may have been reduced to as little as 200 or 300 members today. The organization has scrambled to survive in a new location, but it has remained scattered and effectively disrupted ever since.

Yet, who knows what the future brings. Who knows if the organization will find a new way to regroup (perhaps in the chaos of Syria?) or morph into something new. Bunglers or not, it remains a threat. And for that reason we must stay vigilant. ■



American drones patrol the skies of Afghanistan and record Taliban activity around the clock.



The 10 Most Bungled Terror Attacks

Counter-terrorism is a very difficult business, and it is to America's great fortune that some of its most avowed enemies are also some of its most inept. Like many other types of criminals, terrorists are often driven not by their brains but by their hatred, so while they may make a fearsome image they are often the least likely to be capable of actually hurting anyone other than themselves. They take unnecessary risks or act with inexplicable imprudence,

thereby undermining their own efforts. Here, then, are 10 of the most inept terror attacks.



The Explosives Were Too Heavy

In 2000, Al-Qaeda terrorists were looking for an opportunity to attack an

American military vessel stationed in the port of Yemen, near their base of operations. They targeted the *USS The Sullivans* (named after five Sullivan brothers who lost their lives when their ship was sunk by a Japanese submarine in 1942 during the Battle of Guadalcanal).

The terrorists filled a motorboat with explosives and after finishing their prayers and shouts of "jihad!" they sent the boat off. The plan was for the terrorist in the motorboat to detonate the powerful explosives as soon as he arrived close enough. The resulting explosion would rip a large hole in the side of the ship, hopefully sinking it quickly so the sailors aboard would go down with it.

After bidding farewell to his fellow terrorist, the motorboat's captain excitedly set off for *The Sullivans*, but his enthusiasm was severely dampened when the motorboat sank moments later. In their rush to carry out their plan, the terrorists put all their efforts into preparing the explosives and forgot to consider the all-important craft that was to guide the explosives to the target. The motorboat could not carry the weight of the large amount of explosives needed to blast a large hole in the side of the American ship.



USS The Sullivans, the warship that Al-Qaeda terrorists targeted, launches missiles alongside other warships at the outbreak of the Iraqi War.

three limousines and fill them with as many tanks of propane gas as he could, after which he would drive them into underground parking lots where he would trigger an explosion. The resulting fire would completely destroy the buildings.

The next phase would be to buy 10,000 smoke detectors which contain a radioactive substance called Americium oxide. Barot would burn the devices, releasing the radioactive material into the air. The result would be widespread radiation, sickness and death.

The final stage of the plan was to blow up the subway tunnel in London where it crosses beneath the waters of the Thames River. By blasting a hole in the side of the tunnel, the metro system would be completely flooded.

There were just a few problems with Barot's plan. First, Barot was an ordinary airline ticket agent and could not afford to pay the cost of purchasing these materials. Barot also had no access to weapons, cars or the most basic tools and materials necessary to construct even the most primitive of bombs. Not that it would have done him much good had he owned the supplies: Barot had little knowledge of explosives and bomb-making.

The limousine plan had no chance of working—even if Barot could find the funding for it—as it is extremely unlikely that a large building would be destroyed by

starting a car fire in the basement. Smoke detectors likewise cost plenty, especially 10,000 of them, and burning them would not create the radioactive fallout Barot was hoping to achieve.

As far as the subway tunnel, even if Barot would have known how to build a bomb it would not have done much for him since the walls of the tunnel were made of cement several meters thick.

In short, Dhiren Barot's plans relied on large quantities of explosives which he did not know how to obtain or how to use. As for the other 13 who were arrested together with him, they too were more expert in hate than terror tactics.



The London subway tunnel that runs under the Thames River was to be part of a terrorist attack that never got off the ground.

explosives in his hands.

Now all he had to do was to set the timer and they would have five minutes to evacuate before the bomb detonated. But what was going on here? The timer showed "00:h." What kind number is "h"? Now it showed "00:E." How many minutes are "E" before the bomb would blow up?

Finally, Ahmed realized that he was holding the timer upside down and by the weak light of the lighter he had mistakenly set the timer to detonate the bomb in one minute instead of in five. By the time he realized his error a mighty boom shook the area and Ahmed was blown to bits. Fortunately, in his last moment, Ahmed had absorbed the full force of the blast, protecting the Jefferson Center from damage and showering his shaken colleague with his bloody remains.

A taxi driver who passed the deserted area a few moments later noticed a man covered with blood wandering in the street in a daze. The goodhearted driver drove the man to a hospital free of charge, where local police calmed him, assuming he was the innocent victim of a random act of violence. As they began to put together the pieces of the puzzle, however, the true picture emerged and they arrested the shattered survivor of the bombing.

Upon his release from the hospital, Kahim was transported—again free of charge—directly to the prison where he will spend the rest of his life, to the very last day.

3 Setting the Clock Backwards

The Thomas Jefferson Culture Center in the Philippines has long been a tantalizing target for local Islamic terrorists due to its proximity and its symbolism as a hallmark of imperialist infidel American culture.

When a terror group affiliated with Iraq's late President Saddam Hussein decided in 1991 that it was time to do away with the center once and for all, it made the mistake of sending two of the most inept terrorists the world has yet seen.

Ahmed Ahmed and Sa'ad Kahim procured the necessary materials, fabricated the bombs and set out toward the Culture Center. For some reason they decided to arm the bombs at the target site in the nighttime darkness. The problem was that they forgot to bring a flashlight and instead they were forced to use... a lighter.

Ahmed had to work under extreme pressure as Kahim stood just a few feet away and kept asking him whether he was finished yet so they could make good on their escape before they were discovered. Somehow Ahmed managed to finish arming the bomb without the lighter detonating the

2 Big Plans

In 2004, Dhiren Barot and 13 others were arrested by the British authorities for planning a series of terror attacks. Barot is now serving a 40-year sentence, though from his story it appears that the imprisonment is more for his own protection than for that of the general public.

After years of contemplating how to terrorize the West, Barot decided that he would do it by carrying out no less than three attacks.

This first phase of his master plan was to attack tourist hotels. Barot decided to buy