

New York Terror: Could the Killer Have Been Spotted Sooner?

Alex Nowrasteh

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On Halloween, Uzbek-born Sayfullo Habibullaevic Saipov allegedly murdered eight people and injured 12 with a rented truck in New York City.

The details of the attack, the number of victims, and Saipov's personal information could change over the next few days. However, based on the information that we have so far, Saipov entered the United States in 2010 as a lawful permanent resident with a green card.

He obtained his green card through the Diversity Immigrant Visa Program, which awards 50,000 green cards annually to those who enter the running from select countries.

Uzbekistan has not been a major source of terrorists. From 1975 through the end of 2016, three terrorists born in Uzbekistan attempted attacks on U.S. soil. They killed or injured zero people in their attempted or threatened attacks.

Ulugbek Kodirov was convicted in 2012 of threatening to assassinate President Obama after entering on a student visa. Abdurasul Hasanovich Juraboev entered on a green card that he won in a diversity lottery and also threatened to kill President Obama.

Fazliddin Kurbanov entered as a refugee and was convicted of possessing an unregistered explosive device. Threats to assassinate the president are farfetched, but we count assassinations of politicians as terrorism just as the Global Terrorism Database does.

This handout photograph obtained courtesy of the St. Charles County Dept. of Corrections in the midwestern US state of Missouri on October 31, 2017 shows Sayfullah Habibullahevic Saipov, the suspected driver who killed eight people in New York on October 31, 2017, mowing down cyclists and pedestrians, before striking a school bus in what officials branded a 'cowardly act of terror.' Eleven others were seriously injured in the broad daylight assault and first deadly terror-related attack in America's financial and entertainment capital since the September 11, 2001 Al-Qaeda hijackings brought down the Twin Towers. In April of 2016 a warrant was issued in Missouri for his failure to pay a traffic citation.

If the death toll from the New York attack doesn't rise, a total of 3,037 people have been murdered on U.S. soil by 182 foreign-born terrorists from 1975 through October 31, 2017. Of those 182 foreign-born terrorists, 63 initially entered with green cards.

Including Tuesday's attack, those who entered on a green card killed 16 people, or about 0.53 percent of all people murdered in terror attacks on U.S. soil committed by a foreigner. If the number of injuries stays at 12, terrorists who entered on green cards have injured about 203 people during this period in attacks.

The annual chance of being murdered in a terror attack on U.S. soil committed by a foreign-born person stands at 1 in 3,808,094 per year from 1975 through October 31, 2017.

Saipov's alleged attack stands apart from other Uzbek terrorists in terms of its brutal effectiveness and the tragedy of so many innocent lives murdered. The 50 foreign-born terrorists who murdered somebody in a terrorist attack on U.S. soil from 1975 through October 31, 2017, including the 9/11 attackers, killed an average of 61 people each. Excluding the 9/11 hijackers and their victims, 54 people were murdered in attacks for an average of about 1.7 murders per attacker. Tuesday's vehicular attack killed more people than the 1993 World Trade Center bombing that used a 1,336 pound bomb.

Vehicle attacks are not the norm in the United States where firearms are more readily available, but they are rising in frequency, as we saw in Charlottesville earlier this year. ISIS recently encouraged its followers to use trucks in lone wolf terrorist attacks and Saipov allegedly left a note declaring allegiance to that wannabe-Caliphate.

RAND Corporation terrorism expert Brian Michael Jenkins remarked that airplane hijackings were the norm for 1970s terrorist attacks while suicide bombers were the norm for the 1980s.

Today, vehicle attacks are increasingly common around the world. Jenkins identified approximately 40 vehicle attacks around the world from 2000 through 2016 that resulted in 167 deaths, approximately four per attack. That total also includes the terrorists who died carrying them out.

Automobiles are ubiquitous in a modern society and our lives would be unrecognizable without them. Vehicle barriers can defend against vehicular attacks in crowded areas, but they'd more commonly be used to prevent accidents.

Simply put, there are too many roads, sidewalks, pedestrians, and automobiles to make defenses against these types of terror attacks feasible or cost effective.

Furthermore, the foreign-born terrorist threat is difficult to predict, largely because there are so few of them who successfully attack U.S. soil.

More details will unfold surrounding this terrible attack in coming days.

*Alex Nowrasteh is an immigration policy analyst at the Cato Institute's Center for Global Liberty and Prosperity. He is a coauthor of the book *Open Immigration: Yea and Nay* (Encounter Broadside, 2014).*