



## Nat Hentoff: Nothing funny about Predator drones

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THE Pakistan-born failed Times Square mass murderer - Faisal Shahzad - had become so Americanized during his 12 years in this country that, on being removed from his getaway plane as it was about to take off, he asked the Customs Border officers: "Are you FBI or NYPD?" (New York Daily News, May 8).

Recently made a naturalized citizen, Shahzad, during those years in Connecticut, earned a degree in computer science and then an MBA at the University of Bridgeport; worked at a financial marketing company and other jobs while giving fellow workers and acquaintances no sense that he was any way a jihadist.

However, last year, during a house party in Shelton, Conn., sharp-eyed 18-year-old Dennis Flanner noticed that while everyone else was imbibing and having a good time, a "brooding Shahzad was staring at the TV news in a room packed with drunken partygoers. They were talking about those drones blowing things up in Afghanistan," Flanner said.

Said the glaring, normally reserved Shahzad: "They shouldn't be shooting people from the sky" (N.Y. Daily News, May 5).

I don't know whether his Connecticut neighbors were aware that he often returned to Pakistan during those 12 years or - as he told the officers who arrested him after his horrifying venture at Times Square - that he had received bomb-making training on his last trip home. It took place in the tribal region of Waziristan, near where he grew up; and, as reported in the Wall Street

Journal (May5), that region: "is the locus of the ongoing Central Intelligence Agency campaign to kill militants with unmanned drone strikes." As I've reported several times, these attacks inadvertently also kill innocent civilians, thereby greatly angering - in Afghanistan, Iraq and Yemen - innocent inhabitants, along with murderous jihadists.

Among the outraged was Shahzad. A federal investigator of this - thank goodness - incompetent bomber reports that a major cause of Shahzad's festering rage over the years was "Muslim brothers being killed, innocent people being hit by drones from above" (N.Y. Daily News, May 5).

Despite this information from his interrogators and him (Shahzad has been singing like the proverbial canary in undimmed hatred of the nation sending these Predator and Reaper drones), some analysts remain mystified at how this seemingly assimilated legal resident and new citizen could have so nearly conducted a mass execution. A characteristically flighty

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explanation comes from

powerful New York Sen. Charles Schumer and

Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano.

"It was a one-off," says Napolitano, as Schumer chimes in with, "The odds are quite high that this was a lone wolf."

However, in custody, Shahzad says bomb-making instructors were staff members of Pakistan Taliban, which is allied with al-Qaida. Whether they specifically directed him to Times Square - or that project was his own postgraduate idea - he is, as The Economist warns (May8), "part of a deeply disturbing trend. Last autumn, Najibullah Zazi, an Afghan who grew up in New York, was arrested for plotting to blow up the subway. ... A third of all charged

terror suspects have been American citizens."

Truly the enemy within.

Moreover, Hakimullah Mehsud, a Pakistan Taliban leader, has proudly and chillingly warned of more lethal visitors: "Our fighters are already in the United States" (Wall Street Journal, May 6).

With these non-human Predator planes having become one of President Obama's favorite weapons - raining death from the sky far more frequently than during the Bush-Cheney years, extinguishing more

and more terrorists and non-terrorists - it's remarkable that all the continuing coverage of the fearsome Times Square attempt has omitted an important connection between Shahzad's blood-soaked vision and an April 28 letter to President Obama from the ACLU urging him to think hard and deeply about the consequences of his satisfaction with the unmanned Predators and Reapers.

"If the United States claims the authority," the ACLU told the president, "to use lethal force against suspected

enemies of the United States anywhere in the world - using unmanned drones or other means - then other countries will regard that conduct as justified. The prospect of foreign governments hunting and killing their enemies within our borders or those of our allies is abhorrent."

Shahzad did not have access to a pilotless drone, but he did have a weapon while being spurred by the conviction that as pitiless as the killers from the sky were against his Muslim brothers, he had the right to be as ruthless in the New York epicenter of the nation that is so eager to use these carriers of death.

Shahzad did try to commit a horrendous crime, and

after due process, he merits, if convicted, a life sentence.

(I am against capital punishment for all crimes.)

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What he tried to do, however, was a smoldering footnote to the ACLU's letter to the president. As of this writing, there has been no answer from the White House. But at the May 1 Radio and Television Correspondents' Dinner, Obama did make a joke

about drones. Noting that his daughters were big fans of a band, the Jonas Brothers, who were supposed to be in the audience, Obama said: "They're out there somewhere. ... But boys, don't get any ideas. Two words for you: Predator drones. You'll never see it coming."

Said Pakistani journalist Khawar Rizvi (common [dreams.org](http://dreams.org), May 7): "There's nothing funny about Predator drones. They've killed hundreds of civilians and caused so much suffering in Pakistan. And that's no laughing matter."

There was again no answer from the Nobel Peace Prize-winning president.

Adds the ACLU: "The drones are not accompanied by due process. It's unclear what criteria gets people on the `kill list.'"

Shahzad didn't care about the criteria, either. In editorials, the Washington Post (May 6) and the Wall Street Journal (May 5) cheer on the drones.

Nat Hentoff is a nationally renowned authority on the First Amendment and the Bill of Rights. He is a member of the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, and the Cato Institute,

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