

Enemies Within: Inside The NYPD's Secret Spying Unit and Bin Laden's Final Plot Against America

Matt Apuzzo and Adam Goldman. (Simon and Schuster, 2013) 321 pp.

Reviewed by Richard T. Willing

In September 2009, just after the eighth anniversary of the 9/11 attack, New York City police arrested a street vendor named Najibullah Zasi for plotting to place explosives-laden backpacks in the city's subway system. In choosing New York City, Zasi and his al Qaeda financiers found a target that was both highly symbolic and aggressively defended. A Joint Terrorism Task Force, whose members were drawn from the FBI, New York City Police Department, and other agencies, had hundreds of officers at its disposal to sift intelligence, pursue leads, and build cases against would-be terrorists.

New York City also had its own, homegrown resource: an intelligence division of 600 people with an annual budget the authors peg at \$60 million. The unit, led by a former CIA deputy director of operations, David Cohen, was formed by city officials in the wake of 9/11 to prevent future attacks by identifying and tracking likely attackers, with an emphasis on homegrown Islamist radicals. The unit's existence and wholehearted backing from city and NYPD leaders was a vote of no confidence in the ability of the FBI-led JTTF to keep New Yorkers safe.

But it was not the NYPD intelligence unit that caught Zasi and two other would-be *jihadis* working with him. That was accomplished, in the authors' telling, by textbook collaboration at the collection, analysis, and operational levels by NSA, CIA, and FBI. In fact, they report, NYPD intel very nearly blew the case by unwisely reaching out to an informant who notified Zasi. "Zasi's plot failed because of good partnerships, good intelligence, and good luck," Goldman and Apuzzo write.

The Zasi case is at the heart of the authors' highly critical dissection of the Intelligence Division, now in its 14th year. In this they build on stories they wrote for the Associated Press that won the Pulitzer Prize for Investigative Journalism in 2012. Echoing the themes of that series, Apuzzo and Goldman find little to love about

NYPD Intel. The unit poses an ongoing threat to privacy and religious and civil freedoms while failing to carry out its mission, they conclude.

The constant harping on the civil liberties themes at times becomes a distraction but is not fatal to the book's value. Intelligence professionals, for instance, are likely to be intrigued by the variety of techniques NYPD Intel adopted as it developed its tradecraft. Intelligence officers learn to buy sources. They penetrate colleges, mosques, and social groups using mosque goers and students who have been arrested or have other legal problems that have made them willing to be informants. A demographics unit maps Muslim businesses and mosques.^a "Rakers" troll records of NYC's estimated 300,000 Muslims, looking for patterns, such as Muslims who adopt "American-sounding" names. Police are tasked to perform routine-seeming traffic stops in order to verify identities. NYPD Intel officers haunt markets, cafes, and gathering places in Muslim neighborhoods, "pulsing" their target communities to anticipate problems.

Muslim officers are pulled out of the police academy and furnished with false stories—dismissal for unethical behavior or radical tendencies, for example—to make it easier for them to penetrate extremist groups. The authors' sources tell them of one NYPD Intel detective who was enrolled at The Farm, CIA's training center, though he left before graduating. David Cohen's goal, the authors report, is to penetrate every Yemeni market in the city and every mosque within a 250-mile radius of the city.

The case of Mohammad Elshinawy is a good example. The 23-year-old preacher was a hardcore Salafist once investigated by the FBI as a possible jihadi recruiter.

a. The Demographics Unit was abolished early in 2014. See "New York Drops Unit that Spied Among Muslims," *New York Times*, 16 April 2014.

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The bureau eventually closed the case without bringing charges, but that did not deter NYPD Intel. The unit used a teenager facing a marijuana charge as an informant to attend Elshinawy's lectures. At Elshinawy's wedding, an informant-guest wore a wire while a hidden surveillance camera recorded arriving guests. "We have nothing on the lucky bride at this time but hopefully will learn about her at the service," one intelligence officer wrote.

Though NYPD Intel and the FBI-led JTTF plow the same turf, the units don't always share information. This inevitably leads to trouble. In addition to the intel source who almost blows the Zasi investigation, NYPD Intel tries to place an agent and an officer in Pakistan, informing the FBI only at the last minute. Intel's London station—yes, London!—leaks information the Bureau wants kept quiet. An ill-advised visit from NYPD Intel prompts a potential terrorism target to flee the country.

Apuzzo and Goldman's main case against the Intelligence Division is that it is at the same time both overly intrusive and ineffective. NYPD Intel takes actions that rules prevent the FBI from undertaking. The unit mapped and profiled Muslims based largely on their religion, infiltrated their houses of worship, and monitored entire organizations without specific evidence of wrongdoing. On the failure of the unit to detect the Zasi plot, they

write, "New Yorkers had no idea that they were paying for something that, at the most important moment, had proven useless."

FBI agents talked to the authors and, from the look of the book's many colorful and energetically anti-Cohen anecdotes, talked ... and talked ... and talked. There is turf at stake here: Cohen, as a surrogate for the FBI's traditional rival, CIA, is sometimes too convenient a target for attacks that can come across as self-serving. That Cohen of the CIA has joined forces with NYPD, another rival for turf, makes him a doubly inviting target.

Cohen chose not to be interviewed, which is too bad. Even so, readers might have been better served if a sort of Red Cell analysis could have been presented on his division's behalf. Such an analysis, for instance, might have given readers a broader understanding of the value of its work by exploring plots that were headed off or disrupted or the results of information sharing with other authorities.

That said, *Enemies Within* remains an informative and highly readable account of the merger of police work, foreign and domestic intelligence gathering, and federal and local collaboration in a city that was one of 9/11's prime victims.



