

The 2016 New York and New Jersey Bombings and the 2018 United States Mail Bombings

TEAR Paper

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Abstract

This paper will provide details regarding the 2016 New York and New Jersey bombings inspired by Al Qaeda and the 2018 United States mail bombings carried out with political intent. Both terror attacks will be classified as two separate attacks, with the 2016 New York and New Jersey bombings being an International Religious terror attack, and the 2018 United States mail bombings being a Domestic Dissident terror attack. Both attacks will be compared and discussed, as well as the reasoning for each of their classifications. Regardless of the similarities in the type of weapons used in both attacks, the motives and residence of the attackers requires that both attacks be classified differently.

Keywords: Bombings, Al Qaeda, Terror attacks, International Religious Terror Attack, Domestic Dissident Terror Attack.

The 2016 New York and New Jersey Bombings and the 2018 United States Mail Bombings.

Two notable terror attacks that have taken place within the last ten years in the United States are the 2016 New York and New Jersey bombings, and the 2018 United States mail bombings. In this essay, these two terror attacks will be classified as an International Religious Terror attack and a Domestic dissident terror attack, respectively.

The 2016 New York and New Jersey Bombings.

Ahmed Rahimi brought two homemade bombs from New Jersey to New York on September 17th, 2016. Three bombs detonated on the 17th followed by one on the 18th. According to the Department of Justice, following Rahimi's arrest, journals he owned were uncovered and written inside were excerpts regarding "explosive devices (including "The sounds of bombs will be heard in the streets" and "Bombs set off in the streets they plan to run a mile"), and laudatory references to Usama Bin Laden, the former leader of al Qaeda" (*Chelsea Bomber Ahmad Khan Rahimi Convicted for Executing September 2016 Bombing in New York City*, 2017). Rahimi often wrote about how his attack was heavily inspired by the ideas of leaders of the terrorist group Al Qaeda.

Ahmed Khan Rahimi was a 28-year-old man who lived in Elizabeth, New Jersey when he carried out the New York and New Jersey bombings. While Rahimi wasn't a member of Al Qaeda, he took a lot of inspiration from their ideals, and he based his attack on some of their past terror attacks. U.S Attorney Berman stated, "Inspired by ISIS and al Qaeda, Ahmad Khan Rahimi planted and detonated bombs on the streets of Chelsea, and in New Jersey, intending to kill and maim as many innocent people as possible" (*Chelsea Bomber Ahmad Khan Rahimi Sentenced to Life in Prison for Executing September 2016 Bombing and Attempted Bombing in New York City*, 2018). The Department of Justice states that in regard to Rahimi "The charges contained in the Complaints are merely accusations, and the defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty." (*Ahmad Khan Rahami Charged In Manhattan And New Jersey Federal Courts With Executing Bombings In New York City And New Jersey*, 2016). However, The Department of Justice later releases a statement that says "Ahmad Khan Rahimi, aka, Ahmad Rahami, 30, of Elizabeth, New Jersey, was sentenced to life in prison for his execution and attempted execution of bombings in New York City on Sept. 17, 2016." (*Chelsea Bomber*

Ahmad Khan Rahimi Sentenced to Life in Prison for Executing September 2016 Bombing and Attempted Bombing in New York City, 2018).

As previously stated, Ahmed Rahimi was heavily motivated by the action and attacks of the terror group Al Qaeda. Though not a member of the terror group, Acting Assistant Attorney General Boente stated “Ahmad Khan Rahimi constructed bombs with high explosives and shrapnel to inflict maximum damage to innocent victims in multiple locations” (*Chelsea Bomber Ahmad Khan Rahimi Sentenced to Life in Prison for Executing September 2016 Bombing and Attempted Bombing in New York City, 2018*). The nature of the attacks in similar those of al Qaeda in the sense that they push a religious agenda and target large amounts of innocent individuals.

This terror attack is classified as an International Religious Terror attack. International terrorism is a terrorism carried out in a country that the attacker is not from. Ahmad Rahimi was not a native United States citizen, making him an international attacker. Rahimi was also under the guide of a religious organization when he carried out this attack. The description of a religious terror attack is an attack carried out by a group that believes they have been ordained or commanded by a divine power to carry out certain events, which follows the beliefs of the religious terror group Al Qaeda. Based on the circumstances of this attack, Ahmad Rahimi’s attack is classified as an International Religious terror attack.

Though this terror attack had the ability to have serious and fatal impacts on many innocent people, it is not an extremely commonly known terror attack. In general, the federal government nor the city of New York made any significant changes in regard to procedure. However, the department of Justice stated “Rahimi, who faces mandatory sentence of life in prison, is scheduled to be sentenced on Jan. 18, 2018.” (*Chelsea Bomber Ahmad Khan Rahimi Sentenced to Life in Prison for Executing September 2016 Bombing and Attempted Bombing in New York City, 2018*). Assistant Director Sweeney concluded with “Once again, the lesson learned is clear: if you plot to cause catastrophic damage against this city and our citizens, you will be held accountable” (*Chelsea Bomber Ahmad Khan Rahimi Sentenced to Life in Prison for Executing September 2016 Bombing and Attempted Bombing in New York City, 2018*).

The 2018 United States Mail Bombings.

Starting in October of 2018 “15 packages containing improvised explosive devices were received at multiple locations in New York, Washington, D.C., Florida, Delaware, California, and Georgia. Packages were delivered to prominent critics of President Trump” (*October 2018 Mail Bombing Attempts*, 2025). The people who received these bombs were those who often spoke out against Donald Trump or his policies in government or media.

This attack was carried out by a Florida resident named Cesar Sayoc. Based in the nature of his victims, it is clear that Sayoc’s attacks were heavily influenced by political opinions. Cesar carried out this terror attack by mailing 16 homemade bombs by creating a false identity that he used for a return address. According to the Department of Justice, “repeated copies of an address for “Debbie W. Schultz” in Sunrise, Florida, that is nearly identical, except for typographical errors, to the return address that Sayoc used on the packages.” (*Cesar Sayoc Pleads Guilty to 65 Felonies for Mailing 16 Improvised Explosive Devices in Connection with October 2018 Domestic Terrorist Attack*, 2019). The false identity used was found on Sayoc’s devices, along with a search history that showed his search for the locations of the victims for his attempted attack. The devices seized during the FBI’s search of his van provided that “Sayoc repeatedly searched for the “home address” or “address” of several of the Victims, and Sayoc intensified these searches in the days before his attack. Finally, Sayoc researched online how to make a “letter bomb” and watched videos depicting explosions.” (*Florida Man Sentenced in Manhattan Federal Court to 20 Years in Prison for Mailing 16 Improvised Explosive Devices in Connection with October 2018 Domestic Terrorist Attack*, 2019).

Based on Sayoc’s posts on social media, some which include threats and the targets for his terror attacks, it is widely known that the motivation was regarding political discourse. The Department of Justice found that “he wrote that former President Barack Obama’s “head need[ed] to be chopped off” and he wished “death” to George Soros and former Attorney General Eric Holder.” (*Florida Man Sentenced in Manhattan Federal Court to 20 Years in Prison for Mailing 16 Improvised Explosive Devices in Connection with October 2018 Domestic Terrorist Attack*, 2019). Sayoc also made threats to entire political groups. As the Department of

Justice stated, Sayoc made threats and sent bombs to many left-winged members of government, however, he also committed these attacks toward news sources that criticized Donald Trump.

According to the Department of Homeland Security, “Former CIA Director John Brennan, care of CNN” and “CNN Center” (*October 2018 Mail Bombing Attempts*, 2025) also received handmade bombs from Cesar Sayoc’s false identity.

Cesar Sayoc’s mail bombing attacks are classified as a domestic dissident terror attack. A domestic attack describes an attack by an individual or group who is native to the country being attacked, as was Cesar Altieri Sayoc, who acted alone and was not a part of any terror groups. Furthermore, as dissident attack is classified as an attack taken against a specific group of people, and in this case, the attack was aimed specifically towards left-winged members of government. As previously stated, Sayoc’s motives for his attack were clearly fueled by a right mind political agenda.

When Sayoc was sentenced to 20 years in prison for carrying out his terror attack, The Department of Justice released a statement including a speech by Manhattan U.S. Attorney Geoffrey S. Berman which stated “Today’s sentencing assures us that Ahmad Khan Rahimi will spend the rest of his life behind bars. Once again, the lesson learned is clear: if you plot to cause catastrophic damage against this city and our citizens, you will be held accountable” (*Florida Man Sentenced in Manhattan Federal Court to 20 Years in Prison for Mailing 16 Improvised Explosive Devices in Connection with October 2018 Domestic Terrorist Attack*, 2019). Beside this press release, there is no evidence to suggest that any policy changes occurred as a direct result of Cesar Sayoc’s terror attack. As stated, Sayoc was sentenced to 20 years in prison for sending these bombs made of “a mix of explosive powder from fireworks, shards of glass, and pool chemicals, designed to maximize potential injuries, damage, and the burning of his intended Victims’ skin” (*Florida Man Sentenced in Manhattan Federal Court to 20 Years in Prison for Mailing 16 Improvised Explosive Devices in Connection with October 2018 Domestic Terrorist Attack*, 2019).

While both the 2016 New York and New Jersey bombings and the 2018 United States mail bombings have similarities, it can be argued that these two attacks are substantially more

differences between these two than what they have in common. To begin, the 2016 New York and New Jersey bombings are classified as international religious attacks, while the 2018 United States mail bombings are domestic dissident attacks. Ahmad Rahimi was not Native to the United States, whereas Cesar Sayoc was. Both men had different motives for their terror attacks as well. Rahimi was influenced by the ideals of the religious terror Al Qaeda, and he worked under their regimes. Sayoc's attacks were influenced by his personal political beliefs. This also shows that these two attacks differ regarding the groups involved. Cesar Sayoc acted alone and was not part of or inspired by a specific terror group, while evidence found against Rahimi showed that his attacks were inspired by the acts of Al Qaeda. Another notable difference between these two attacks were the victims involved. Sayoc targeted specific people who he felt were guilty of something or that he felt deserved to be harmed. Rahimi sent places random bombs, some which were intended to detonate when these areas were busiest with innocent bystanders.

Similarities and Differences between the 2016 New York and New Jersey Bombings and the 2018 United States Mail Bombings.

The 2016 New York and New Jersey bombings and the 2018 United States mail bombings have differing motives, classifications, and targets; however, there are certain circumstances of both attacks that are similar. Firstly, the arguably most baseline similarity in these two attacks is that both perpetrators were male. Relating more to the physical attacks, both utilized homemade bombs created by the attackers, and both attacks were targeted at individuals, whether specified or random, with the intent to cause harm or kill. Arguably the most important similarity between these two terror attacks is the lack in change in policy as a result of these acts. Both perpetrators faced time in prison and statement were released showing support of the police department and their work to catch these attackers, but no physical changes were made to law of policy to prevent either of these attacks from happening again. As Previously stated there are clearly many differences between both attacks; however though there are less similarities, both are important to consider when discussing the actions, or lack thereof, of the government and officials in regard to fundamental changes in the way events such as the terror attacks can be eliminated.

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