

First, the bombing signaled a new terrorist challenge, one whose rage and malice had no limit. Ramzi Yousef, the Sunni extremist who planted the bomb, said later that he had hoped to kill 250,000 people.³

Second, the FBI and the Justice Department did excellent work investigating the bombing. Within days, the FBI identified a truck remnant as part of a Ryder rental van reported stolen in Jersey City the day before the bombing.⁴

Mohammed Salameh, who had rented the truck and reported it stolen, kept calling the rental office to get back his \$400 deposit. The FBI arrested him there on March 4, 1993. In short order, the Bureau had several plotters in custody, including Nidal Ayyad, an engineer who had acquired chemicals for the bomb, and Mahmoud Abouhalima, who had helped mix the chemicals.⁵

The FBI identified another conspirator, Ahmad Ajaj, who had been arrested by immigration authorities at John F. Kennedy International Airport in September 1992 and charged with document fraud. His traveling companion was Ramzi Yousef, who had also entered with fraudulent documents but claimed political asylum and was admitted. It quickly became clear that Yousef had been a central player in the attack. He had fled to Pakistan immediately after the bombing and would remain at large for nearly two years.⁶

The arrests of Salameh, Abouhalima, and Ayyad led the FBI to the Farouq mosque in Brooklyn, where a central figure was Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman, an extremist Sunni Muslim cleric who had moved to the United States from Egypt in 1990. In speeches and writings, the sightless Rahman, often called the "Blind Sheikh," preached the message of Sayyid Qutb's *Milestones*, characterizing the United States as the oppressor of Muslims worldwide and asserting that it was their religious duty to fight against God's enemies. An FBI informant learned of a plan to bomb major New York landmarks, including the Holland and Lincoln tunnels. Disrupting this "landmarks plot," the FBI in June 1993 arrested Rahman and various confederates.⁷

As a result of the investigations and arrests, the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York prosecuted and convicted multiple individuals, including Ajaj, Salameh, Ayyad, Abouhalima, the Blind Sheikh, and Ramzi Yousef, for crimes related to the World Trade Center bombing and other plots.

An unfortunate consequence of this superb investigative and prosecutorial effort was that it created an impression that the law enforcement system was well-equipped to cope with terrorism. Neither President Clinton, his principal advisers, the Congress, nor the news media felt prompted, until later, to press the question of whether the procedures that put the Blind Sheikh and Ramzi Yousef behind bars would really protect Americans against the new virus of which these individuals were just the first symptoms.⁸

Third, the successful use of the legal system to address the first World Trade Center bombing had the side effect of obscuring the need to examine the character and extent of the new threat facing the United States. The trials did not bring the Bin Ladin network to the attention of the public and policymakers.