



# THE FEAR FACTORY

“So, what you wanna do?” the friend asked. ¶ “A target?” the wanna-be jihadi replied. “I want some type of city-hall-type stuff, federal courthouses.”

It was late November 2006, and twenty-two-year-old Derrick Shareef and his friend Jameel were hanging out in Rockford, Illinois, dreaming about staging a terrorist attack on America. The two men weren't sure what kind of assault they could pull off. All Shareef knew was that he wanted to cause major damage, to wreak vengeance on the country he held responsible for oppressing Muslims worldwide. “Smoke a judge,” Shareef said. Maybe firebomb a government building.

But while Shareef harbored violent fantasies, he was hardly a serious threat as a jihadi. An American-born convert to Islam, he had no military training and no weapons. He had less than \$100 in the bank. He worked in a dead-end job as a clerk in a video-game store. He didn't own a car. So dire were his circumstances, Shareef had no place to live. Then one day, Jameel, a fellow Muslim, had shown up at EB Games and offered him shelter. Within hours of meeting his new brother, Shareef had moved in with Jameel and his three wives and nine children. Living together, the pair fantasized about targets in Rockford, a Midwestern city of 150,000, with a minuscule Muslim population and the lone claim to fame of being the hometown of Cheap Trick.

The fact that Shareef was a loser with no means of living out his imagination didn't stop his friend from encouraging his delusions of grandeur. On the contrary, Jameel continually pushed Shareef to escalate his plans. “When you wanna plan on doing this?” he asked Shareef, talking about the plot to go after a government building. “Because we have to make specific plans and dates.”

**THE FBI NOW HAS MORE THAN 100 TASK FORCES DEVOTED EXCLUSIVELY TO FIGHTING TERRORISM. BUT IS THE GOVERNMENT MANUFACTURING GHOSTS?**

**BY GUY LAWSON**

**ILLUSTRATION BY MATT MAHURIN**

"I wanna case one first," Shareef said. There was only one problem: Jameel's car was in the garage getting repaired. "We can case one when you get the car back."

"What about time frame?" Jameel prodded.

"I like the holiday season," Shareef said, displaying an ambivalence unusual in a suicide bomber hellbent on murdering civilians. "Hell, we ain't gotta hit nobody – just blow the place up."

Finding a meaningful target to blow

didn't know that his brand-new friend – the eager co-conspirator drawing him ever further into a terror plot – was actually an informant for the FBI.

As Shareef cursed America and Jews, he was under almost constant surveillance by the Joint Terrorism Task Force for the Northern District of Illinois. Since 9/11, the number of such outfits across the country has tripled. With more than 2,000 FBI agents now assigned to 102 task forces, the JTTFs have effec-

"The hope is that they will nab an actual terrorist or prevent a putative jihadist from becoming one," says David Cole, a law professor at Georgetown University and co-author of *Less Safe, Less Free*, a new book detailing the ways 9/11 has transformed domestic law enforcement. "It makes sense in general – but when you're pressing people to undertake conduct they would have never undertaken without an informant pushing them along, there is a real question if you're

would have on a jury was huge.

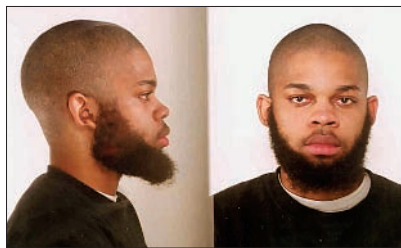
"My name is Talib Abu Salam Ibn Shareef," Shareef said, using his self-created nom de guerre. "I am from America, and this tape is to let you guys know, who disbelieve in Allah, to let the enemies of Islam know, and to let the Muslims alike know that the time for jihad is now."

The next Wednesday, the two men met with Cap in a parking lot under the gaze of agents from the JTTF. As Shareef swapped the used speakers for four non-functioning grenades and a 9mm handgun with neutered ammunition, he was swarmed by law enforcement. News of the bust traveled the world over. "It had all the makings of a holiday bloodbath," Fox News breathlessly reported. Shareef was charged with the ultimate crime in the so-called War on Terror: attempting to use a weapon of mass destruction.

The arrest of Shareef was yet another JTTF success, with the homeland again saved from a savage attack, this time from a man the government branded a "lone wolf."

Or it was an illusion, a fictional plot developed in a self-fulfilling and self-serving cycle of chasing ghosts.

## BY ANY OBJECTIVE MEASURE, SHAREEF WAS A PATHETIC AND HAPLESS JIHADIST – ONE OF A NEW BREED OF TERRORISTS THE GOVERNMENT CLAIMS IS TARGETING THE COUNTRY.



### TERROR ENTRAPMENT

The FBI arrested Derrick Shareef (far left) in 2006 for planning an attack on a mall (left) in Rockford, Illinois. But in reality it was an FBI informant who drove the plot, prodding the almost-penniless store clerk to concoct a scheme he had no hope of enacting.

up in Rockford isn't easy. A hardscrabble town in the middle of America, the place is not much more than an intersection of interstates and railway lines, with little of note that might attract the attention of terrorists. So Jameel suggested the main attraction in town: CherryVale Mall, a sad-sack collection of clothing stores and sneaker shops on the outskirts of Rockford. "The mall's good," he told Shareef.

"I swear by Allah, man, I'm down for it too," Shareef said. "I'm down for the cause. I'm down to live for the cause and die for the cause, man."

When Jameel got his car back from the garage, the two men went to case the mall.

"If you ever wanna back out . . . 'cause, you gotta let me know," Jameel said. "I'm checking your heart now."

"I'm down," Shareef said.

"We ain't gonna get caught," Jameel assured him. "Don't worry."

"I'm not worried about getting caught," Shareef replied. "Not alive."

**F**OR ALL HIS BLUSTER, SHAREEF was, by any objective measure, a pathetic and hapless jihadist – one of a new breed of domestic terrorists the federal government has paraded before the media since 9/11. The FBI, in a sense, elevated Shareef, working to transform him from a boastful store clerk into a suicidal mall-bomber. Like many other alleged extremists who have been targeted by the authorities, Shareef

tively become a vast, quasi-secret arm of the federal government, granted sweeping new powers that outstrip those of any other law-enforcement agency. The JTTFs consist not only of local police, FBI special agents and federal investigators from Immigration and the IRS, but covert operatives from the CIA. The task forces have thus effectively destroyed the "wall" that historically existed between law enforcement and intelligence-gathering. Under the Bush administration, the JTTFs have been turned into a domestic spy agency, like Britain's MI5 – one with the powers of arrest.

The expenditure of such massive resources to find would-be terrorists inevitably requires results. Plots must be uncovered. Sleeper cells must be infiltrated. Another attack must be prevented – or, at least, be seen to be prevented. But in backwaters like Rockford, the JTTFs don't have much to do. To find threats to thwart, the task forces have increasingly taken to using paid informants to cajole and inveigle targets like Shareef into pursuing their harebrained schemes. In the affidavit sworn by an FBI special agent in support of Shareef's indictment, the co-conspirator who called himself Jameel is known only as "CS" (Cooperating Source). In fact, CS was William Chrisman, a former crack dealer with a conviction for attempted robbery who was paid \$8,500 by the JTTF and dispatched specifically to set up Shareef. Like other informants in terrorism cases, Chrisman had been "tasked" by federal agents to indulge and escalate Shareef's fantasies – while carefully ensuring that Shareef incriminated himself.

creating crime, not preventing crime."

In Rockford, "Jameel" repeatedly urged Shareef to dream up gory details of the havoc they would cause at the mall. Chrisman had received a call, he told Shareef, from a man he called "Cap" – a contact willing to sell them weapons. They could buy "pineapples" – code for hand grenades – from Cap for fifty bucks each. Cap, of course, was an undercover agent. Eleven "pineapples" were available, Chrisman said. Walking around the mall – the Dippin' Dots, the Panda Express – Shareef suggested they toss the "pineapples" in garbage cans to create shrapnel. They would fast for three days beforehand. They would shave their bodies. They would meditate and pray.

"Don't forget, man, we should get the grenades sometime next week," Chrisman said. "So you should try to get as much *floous* [money] as you can get."

"I got a little change in the bank," Shareef said.

"All you need is, like, \$100. That's two grenades."

But the resourceless Shareef couldn't even raise that much money. So with the JTTF determined to push the "plot" forward, Chrisman announced that Cap had agreed to exchange the grenades for some used stereo speakers Shareef owned. On the following Saturday, as snow blanketed Rockford, Chrisman and Shareef engaged in the ritual of suicide bombers, recording video statements of each other reciting their last wills and testaments. The JTTF's affidavit doesn't reveal whose idea it was to stare into the camera and swear vengeance against America, but the prejudicial impact it

**F**OR LAW ENFORCEMENT, FEAR AND the politics of fear have entwined to create a radical new paradigm. Even the term "law enforcement" has been rendered quaint by the Bush administration. These days, the term of art is "lawfare" – the confluence of police work and military tactics. With Joint Terrorism Task Forces set up across the country to coordinate the work of federal agencies and local cops, the FBI now devotes nearly two-thirds of its resources – some \$4 billion – to waging war on terrorism. The approach today is not the traditional police work of investigating actual crimes but the far more slippery goal of preventing terrorist attacks before they occur.

To hear the Bush administration tell it, the JTTFs have been an unqualified success. The task forces have been credited with uncovering and busting up home-grown terrorist cells in Oregon, Seattle, Detroit, Miami, Buffalo and New Jersey. All told, the Feds have accused 619 people of "terrorist activity" since 9/11 – a record that the FBI insists has made America safer. In 2005 alone, more than 10 million terror inquiries were checked against the JTTF's Investigative Data Warehouse, a central repository for "terrorism-related documents." Such numbers create the sense that America is indeed under siege – and that the government is on top of the threat. "These extremists are self-recruited, self-trained and self-executing," FBI Director Robert Mueller declared in 2006. "These home-grown terrorists may prove to be as dangerous as groups like Al Qaeda, if not more so."

But a closer inspection of the cases

Contributing editor GUY LAWSON wrote *"The Brotherhoods: The True Story of Two Cops Who Murdered for the Mafia."*

brought by JTTFs reveals that most of the prosecutions had one thing in common: The defendants posed little if any demonstrable threat to anyone or anything. According to a study by the Center on Law and Security at the New York University School of Law, only ten percent of the 619 “terrorist” cases brought by the federal government have resulted in convictions on “terrorism-related” charges – a category so broad as to be meaningless. In the past year, none of the convictions involved jihadist terror plots targeting America. “The government releases selective figures,” says Karen Greenberg, director of the center. “They have never even defined ‘terrorism.’ They keep us in the dark over statistics.”

Indeed, Shareef is only one of many cases where the JTTFs have employed dubious means to reach even more dubious ends. In Buffalo, the FBI spent eighteen months tracking the “Lackawanna Six” – a half-dozen men from the city’s large Muslim population who had been recruited by an Al Qaeda operative in early 2001 to undergo training in Afghanistan. Only two lasted the six-week course; the rest pretended to be hurt or left early. Despite extensive surveillance, the FBI found no evidence that the men ever discussed, let alone planned, an attack – but that didn’t stop federal agents from arresting the suspects with great fanfare and accusing them of operating an “Al Qaeda-trained terrorist cell on American soil.” Fearing they would be designated as “enemy combatants” and disappeared into the legal void created by the Patriot Act, all six pleaded guilty to aiding Al Qaeda and were sentenced to at least seven years in prison.

In other cases, the use of informants has led the government to flirt with outright entrapment. In Brooklyn, a Guyanese immigrant and former cargo handler named Russell Defreitas was arrested last spring for plotting to blow up fuel tanks at JFK International Airport. In fact, before he encountered the might of the JTTF, Defreitas was a vagrant who sold incense on the streets of Queens and spent his spare time checking pay phones for quarters. He had no hope of instigating a terrorist plot of the magnitude of the alleged attack on JFK – until he received the help of a federal informant known only as “Source,” a convicted drug dealer who was cooperating with federal agents to get his sentence reduced. Backed by the JTTF, Defreitas suddenly obtained the means to travel to the Caribbean, conduct Google Earth searches of JFK’s grounds and build a complex, multifaceted, international terror conspiracy – albeit one that was impossible to actually pull off. After Defreitas was arrested, U.S. Attorney Roslynn Mausekopf called it “one of the most chilling plots imaginable.”

Using informants to gin up terrorist conspiracies is a radical departure from

the way the FBI has traditionally used cooperating sources against organized crime or drug dealers, where a pattern of crime is well established before the investigation begins. Now, in new-age terror cases, the JTTFs simply want to establish that suspects are predisposed to be terrorists – even if they are completely unable or ill-equipped to act on that predisposition. High-tech video and audio evidence, coupled with anti-terror hysteria, has made it effectively impossible for suspects to use the legal defense of entrapment. The result in many cases has been guilty pleas – and no scrutiny of government conduct.

In most cases, because no trial is ever held, few details emerge beyond the spare and slanted descriptions in the indictments. When facts do come to light during a trial, they cast doubt on the seriousness of the underlying case. The “Albany Pizza” case provides a stark example. Known as a “sting case,” the investigation began in June 2003 when U.S. soldiers raided an “enemy camp” in Iraq and seized a notebook containing the name of an imam in Albany – one Yassin Aref.

proud to be an American.” But enticed by Malik, Hossain soon found himself caught up in a government-concocted terror plot. Posing as an arms dealer, Malik told Hossain that a surface-to-air missile was needed for an attack on a Pakistani diplomat in New York. He offered Hossain \$5,000 in cash to help him launder \$50,000 – a deal Hossain claims he never properly grasped. According to Muslim tradition, a witness is needed for significant financial transactions. Thus, the JTTF reached out for Hossain’s imam and the true target of the sting – Aref.

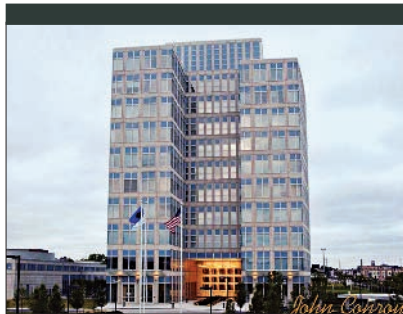
At trial, the judge brushed aside questions about why the government was after Aref in the first place. “The FBI had certain suspicions, good and valid suspicions, for looking into Mr. Aref,” he told the jury. “But why they did that is not to be any concern of yours.” For their role in a conspiracy confected entirely by the FBI, both Aref and Hossain were convicted of attempting to provide material support to terrorists and sentenced to fifteen years in federal prison.

“I am just a pizza man,” the bewildered Hossain said at his sentencing. “I make good pizza.”

siege. When Special Agent Robert Holley, who supervises the JTTF’s Squad Counterterrorism I, offers to escort me to his office on the eighth floor, we are stopped by his superior before we even reach the hallway. The entire floor, the supervisor declares, is considered secure – there are classified documents on desks – and therefore off-limits to outsiders.

Holley, an ex-military type who is built like a bullet, rolls his eyes but complies. There is no problem finding another room for a meeting. There are acres of empty offices and cubicles in the eerily futuristic building, the premises far larger than current requirements dictate but ready for expansion should the need arise with another terrorist attack.

Counterterrorism squads like the one overseen by Holley are assigned to monitor distant “Areas of Responsibility” – the Horn of Africa, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Iraq. The six CT squads in Chicago are also divided into two categories: Five “substantive” groups like Holley’s, which gather intelligence and conduct long-term investigations of specific individuals, and another squad that is charged with chasing down leads



#### THE WATCHTOWER

Headquarters of the Joint Terrorism Task Force for northern Illinois (above). Agents analyze data from Operation Virtual Shield (right), a surveillance web of thousands of cameras that provide a nearly comprehensive visual record of public movement in Chicago.



## HIGH-TECH VIDEO AND AUDIO EVIDENCE, COUPLED WITH ANTI-TERROR HYSTERIA, HAS MADE IT EFFECTIVELY IMPOSSIBLE TO USE THE LEGAL DEFENSE OF ENTRAPMENT.

To snare Aref, the JTTF dispatched a Pakistani immigrant named Shahed “Malik” Hussain, who was facing years in prison for a driver’s-license scam. Instead of approaching Aref directly, federal agents sent Malik to befriend Mohammed Hossain, a Bangladeshi immigrant who went to the same mosque as Aref. Hossain, an American citizen who ran a place called Little Italy Pizzeria in Albany, had no connections whatsoever to terrorism or any form of radical Islam. After the attacks on 9/11, he had been quoted in the local paper saying, “I am

**D**ESPITE THE RAPID AND WIDESPREAD proliferation of JTTFs, very little has been reported about what goes on inside the War on Terror’s domestic front. The FBI building that houses the JTTF for the Northern District of Illinois has been moved from the middle of the city to a more spacious, fortresslike building on the industrial west side of Chicago, a place out of the city’s Loop, literally and figuratively. The glass tower is surrounded by a tall metal fence, and layers upon layers of security inside and out add to the sense of

and determining the “threat profile” of suspects to decide if an investigation is merited. Holley’s squad currently has some seventy-five open investigations – he won’t give the precise number – in nearly every country under his purview. “A lot of our successes you don’t see,” he says. “We don’t measure our success by the number of prosecutions.”

When I ask what kinds of cases his CT squad has made, Holley cites the example of a local cab driver who came up on the JTTF’s radar some time back – he won’t say how or why. The man was East

African, Holley says, a suspected Islamic extremist “connected to known bad guys overseas.” After being interviewed by the JTTF, the cabbie decided to leave the country. Nothing criminal had occurred, and no charges were laid. The cab driver had simply come to the attention of the JTTF, and that in itself was enough to dispose of the matter.

“Can we consider that a success because we didn’t put him in jail?” Holley asks. “Absolutely. This guy is no longer here. He is not a threat to one person in the United States.”

“Was he ever a threat?” I ask.

“We opened up an investigation.”

“But isn’t that a circular argument?”

“Was he a bomb-thrower?” Holley concedes. “Probably not. Did he want to go into a mall and attack? No.”

The next morning, I meet with three members of the Field Intelligence Group. The FIGs are designed to create a centralized approach to intelligence, both domestic and foreign. In northern Illinois, the group analyzes information from around the world, as well as that supplied courtesy of Operation Virtual Shield, the surveillance initiative designed to make Chicago one of the most-watched cities in the world. Thousands of cameras deployed on street corners, train platforms and buses now provide a nearly comprehensive visual record of all public movement in Chicago.

The unexceptional-seeming trio from the FIG dodge most of my questions on the grounds of national security. Mike Delejewski, a soft-spoken intelligence analyst, says that every call that comes into the JTTF is passed along to the FIG, which runs down every lead, no matter how improbable. Delejewski mentions a call received regarding the Sears Tower and three suspicious-looking men seen in the vicinity. That was all the report said. The FIG and CT squads responded. The men turned out to be Mexican tourists.

“We get a lot of those calls,” Delejewski says with a laugh.

Many of the callers who contact the JTTF are intentionally misleading, hoping to take revenge against a boyfriend, neighbor or co-worker. Such hoaxes are so routine, in fact, that the JTTF’s public-relations officer keeps a separate file stuffed with press reports of invented pipe bombs and unattended suitcases and lunch trucks packed with explosives.

None of the three analysts in the FIG have Arabic-language skills or extensive experience in the countries they are supposed to monitor. To keep informed, they read newspapers and intelligence reports. They then issue bul-

letins to police departments about perceived threats.

“What is the biggest threat?” I ask.

There is a long pause.

“I think it’s very dangerous if we start to identify that,” an analyst named Julie Irvine says.

“The enemy is listening,” Assistant Special Agent in Charge Gregory Fowler adds later. “I drill that into my people’s heads every day. Foreign-intelligence agencies and terrorists are listening. The FBI is on a war footing.”

When I express skepticism at the na-



## HOMEGROWN HYPE

FBI Director Robert Mueller (above) calls domestic terrorists “as dangerous as Al Qaeda.” But most of the accused – like pizza maker Mohammed Hossain (right) – posed no discernible threat.

“I have access to the information,” Fowler says. “I have a lot of faith in the judgment of the common citizen. A lot of people understand the nature of the threat.”

**T**O GET A PERSPECTIVE ON HOW the War on Terror is being waged by cops on the street, I meet with two local police officers assigned to the JTTF. Sgt. Paul DeRosa of the Chicago Police Department and Master Sgt. Carl Gutierrez of the Illinois State Police act as liaison officers for their respective



## ONLY TEN PERCENT OF THE 619 CASES BROUGHT BY THE GOVERNMENT HAVE RESULTED IN CONVICTIONS ON “TERRORISM-RELATED” CHARGES.

ture of the cases being brought by the JTTF, and the wild-goose chases that seem to occupy its time, Fowler says people don’t understand the “threat stream” facing the nation. There are two reasons, he insists, that cases brought by the JTTF end up being discounted. First, defense attorneys manipulate the public to create the impression that the accused are hapless – but since very few cases actually go to trial, this explanation is unlikely at best. Second, Fowler says, the FBI itself minimizes threats to prevent panic. As an example, he cites the case of “shoe bomber” Richard Reid, who pleaded guilty to terror-related charges. Reid, Fowler insists, was a much greater danger to America than is commonly appreciated – a refrain that requires the word of the JTTF be taken on faith.

“The public is never going to see the evidence we have,” Fowler says. “We don’t want to reveal our hand or tip our sources. You cannot judge the nature of the terrorist threat to the United States based on the public record.”

“But with such strictures,” I ask, “how does a citizen become informed about the threat?”

forces. Both are on call 24/7 for 365 days of the year. Both are regularly summoned at three in the morning to investigate potential terrorist activity in Chicago.

“This weekend I had two calls,” Gutierrez says.

When I ask what the calls were about, all Gutierrez will say is that they involved “suspicious incidents” which “could possibly have a terrorist nexus.” An example: People traveling on a train see someone taking photographs and acting suspiciously, and phone the police. “You have to understand we take those sort of calls very seriously,” Gutierrez says. “We have to. If we don’t, and something happens, and it comes back to us and lives are lost, who’s to blame?”

To illustrate the kinds of cases the JTTF generates, Sgt. DeRosa cites an incident from three years ago. Two Middle Eastern men boarded a bus on Lake Shore Drive. They were bearded, dressed in traditional Arabic garb and sitting next to each other. As they rode the bus, one man was clicking a counter – the kind used at nightclubs to keep track of the crowd size. A passenger on the bus called 911.

“A report was made, and our CT squad was notified,” DeRosa says. “We went and got the film from that bus. We reviewed it. We could see them clicking. We ask ourselves, ‘Are they clicking passengers? Are they clicking when they go past buildings? Are they clicking on how many cars?’ We put out a ‘Bolo’ – Be on the Lookout. We found where they got on the bus, and we did a stakeout. Seven or eight cars set up on the bus stop. On the third day, we spotted the guy. We talked to him.” No one was arrested. There was no crime alleged. But DeRosa says proudly that the JTTF succeeded in finding the Man With the Clicker.

“Why was the man clicking?” I ask.

“They had to say a Muslim prayer 50,000 times,” DeRosa says. “At first, we thought that was nonsense. Since then we’ve had a few of these incidents. Are these guys terrorists? Probably not. But in three days, they were identified and interviewed by the power of the JTTF – city and state police, FBI, Secret Service. Does that send a message to their community?”

Chicago has one of the largest Muslim populations in the country – some 400,000, DeRosa estimates. “Experts say that between five and ten percent of Muslims are extremists. So you take it down to one percent. What’s one percent of 400,000? Forty thousand? Technically there could be 40,000 –”

“You mean 4,000,” I say.

DeRosa pauses. “Right,” he says. “Four thousand.” He forges on. “Most people who come to America who are Middle Eastern come for a good reason. But there’s still a percentage that may be here that don’t like us. They are with the extremists.”

Gutierrez offers another instance of the JTTF at work. A man of apparent Middle Eastern background came into a Chicago police station and said he worked for the Department of Defense and he had top-secret documents in his truck, which had been stolen. He also said his roommate was a terrorist. The man appeared to be a kook. But an allegation had been made. The JTTF was contacted. Gutierrez was called out, and he interviewed the subject. He soon verified that the man was, in fact, nuts. But the matter didn’t end there.

“We interviewed the roommate,” Gutierrez says. “He was an Egyptian. We ran his name. He was here illegally. ICE [Immigration and Customs Enforcement] was there within two hours. I’ve never seen ICE react the way they did. They came out and took physical custody of the guy. They kept him until his court hearing, and he was sent overseas.”

“Was there any evidence or suggestion that the man was actually a terrorist?” I ask.

“You never know,” DeRosa says.

“Have you ever found a terrorist cell?” I ask.

For an online history of every homeland-security terror alert and the real news that was buried, visit [rollingstone.com/fbiterroralert](http://rollingstone.com/fbiterroralert)

"That's kind of a vague question," Gutierrez says. "There are certain things we can't talk about, because it leads to more."

"Do I believe there's a cell in Chicago?" DeRosa asks. "I bet you there is. Do I have any direct physical knowledge? No. But I think there is one, and that's why we're here."

The two officers tell me about a close call at the Taste of Chicago food festival last year. Millions attend the annual street feast, with Chicago-style sausage and pizza and tamales on sale in booths along the lakefront. As with all major public events, the JTTF helped plan the security profile. A JHAT – a Joint Hazardous Assessment Team – set up at the festival, dotting the area with devices that detect signs of a chemical or biological or radiological attack. Suddenly, one of the devices went off: There was a radiological hit on one of the sniffers near a row of porta-potties. For an hour, the JHAT frantically tried to determine if Chicago had been struck by a "dirty bomb" – a weapon that spreads lethal radioactive material mixed with conventional explosives. Finally, after an anxious hour, the hit was traced to a particular outhouse – and the cause of the positive alert was determined.

"Someone who had chemotherapy had just done a poop," DeRosa says.

**T**HERE IS CONSIDERABLE SKEPTICISM in local police departments in northern Illinois about the nature and extent of the threat posed by terrorism. There are 415 local law-enforcement agencies in the district, many of which remain unconvinced that the threat is as dire as the JTTF maintains. Many departments refuse to allocate even one or two officers to spend four hours on basic terror training. Rather than consider the idea that the cops closest to the ground might have a better perspective on their communities, the JTTF addressed the problem by forming a TLOC – Terrorism Liaison Officer's Committee. The point is to merchandise the menace of terrorism to the police.

"It's a matter of marketing strategy," says Mark Lundgren, a special agent who oversees the TLOC. "These terrorism acts are trending toward the home-grown, self-activated, self-radicalized – the sort of thing that could literally pop up in your back yard. The typical things we would use to detect terrorism don't work, because these people are off the charts, so to speak. Nine times out of ten, for the next decade, it's going to be the local cop who stops the terror attacks."

Lundgren, who resembles a young Gary Busey, fairly glistens with certainty about the value of his work.

"What are you trying to sell to the local police departments?" I ask.

"Awareness. Motivation," he says.

"It's a very hard sell. You walk into a chief of police in a crime-ridden district. The first thing he's going to tell you is, 'The guys in this area are killing people. The guys you're telling me about – it's not make-believe, I understand that – but they haven't killed anyone lately in my district.'"

"Or ever," I say.

"Exactly."

When Derrick Shareef was arrested by the JTTF, the police chief in Rockford complained that his force had been told very little about the investigation. The city has one of the highest murder rates in the state, as well as raging drug and juvenile delinquency woes. Dominic Iasparro is a senior investigator who is working the case of an addict found dead on the outskirts of town. He tells me he has no real leads. There is a small FBI outpost in Rockford, with ten or so agents, but it provides no assistance on a homicide. Local police have scant interaction with the JTTF, and Iasparro doesn't exactly see terrorism as a top

members of the TLOC. They want to train cops to watch out for "suspicious terroristlike behavior," without revealing what such behavior might look like. "We're teaching police how to approach a suspicious person in a public place," Lundgren tells me. "How to probe that person. How to look at the body language they exhibit, how they answer questions, to determine if they are a threat or not – in a way that doesn't leave that person feeling they've been ill-treated. There are detractors out there that think our cases are without merit. That's a philosophical question that's easy to ask until you're a body part."

"Without getting too philosophical, remember the whole Dick Cheney one percent solution," Lundgren continues. "If there is a one percent chance that a device can be constructed that will kill thousands, or hundreds of thousands, of people, then we have to treat our response as if there were a 100 percent chance. That's a thing that gets lost in the view of the public when they see the

was empty, the furniture gone. Members of the JTTF told me that they wished they could reveal the rest of the story, to prove that Shareef was a true bad guy. According to the indictment of another accused terrorist, Hassan Abu-Jihaad, Shareef was involved in a larger conspiracy to attack a military base in San Diego. In pretrial proceedings, however, it emerged that Abu-Jihaad was egged on by none other than William "Jameel" Chrisman, the same informant who set up Shareef. Abu-Jihaad not only refused to participate in the alleged plot but on surveillance tapes can be heard dismissing Shareef as an idiot and a liar. "I ain't no jihadi," Abu-Jihaad told Jameel.

While real threats undoubtedly exist, what the Bush administration promotes as a nationwide pattern of terrorist activities is largely the result of its own policies in the age of lawfare. Last May, the FBI arrested the "Fort Dix Six," charging the men with conspiring to attack the New Jersey military base. The supposed terror cell was discovered when a clerk at Circuit City was asked to transfer to DVD a video of the men allegedly training for jihad in the Pocono Mountains and shouting, "Allahu Akbar!" [God is great!] As in other cases, the FBI itself proved to be the mastermind behind the plot. The men – who included three roofers, a taxi driver and a former delivery boy for Super Mario's Pizza – had little money and no connections to real extremists. All were in their twenties and spent their weekends playing paintball. Under the guidance of two informants for the JTTF, the men planned an assault on Fort Dix using rocket-propelled grenades and AK-47s – none of which actually existed.

There are signs, however, that judges and jurors are getting fed up with such concocted "threats." In December, the prosecution of the "Liberty City Seven" ended in one acquittal and a hung jury for the rest of the accused. The supposed cell was accused of preparing a "full ground war" against America by bringing down the Sears Tower and other buildings. At trial, however, it emerged that the men had no operational abilities, that the plots were dreamed up at the exhortation of two paid FBI informants while smoking dope and that the group had been provided its camera, military boots and warehouse by the JTTF.

Despite 15,000 surveillance recordings of the men, including one in which they swore allegiance to Osama bin Laden, the jury refused to convict. "This was all written, produced, directed, choreographed and stage-designed by the United States government," Albert Levin, an attorney for one of the accused, said in his closing argument.

Undeterred, the government is taking six of the men back to court. The retrial was scheduled to begin on January 22nd.

## DOES THE FBI HAVE ANY EVIDENCE OF A TERROR CELL IN CHICAGO? "NO," SAYS A JTTF OFFICER. "BUT I THINK THERE IS ONE, AND THAT'S WHY WE'RE HERE."



### FALSE ALARMS?

Lamese Shnewer (left) holds a photo of her brother, one of the "Fort Dix Six." Surveillance footage of Russell Defreitas (below right), a homeless man accused of plotting to blow up JFK.



priority in northern Illinois. "We're not a big enough target," he says.

A thirty-five-year veteran, Iasparro follows JTTF bulletins and updates online, and he doesn't doubt the good intentions of the agents involved in the task force. But he also understands that the pressure on the federal government to avoid another attack is enormous. To a local cop like Iasparro, the amount of resources the government devotes to the effort is staggering.

"Do you think the JTTF is jumping at ghosts?" I ask.

He shakes his head in wonder. "I have never seen anything like it in my career."

The attitude of local cops frustrates

intelligence-gathering of law enforcement. They get concerned about their civil liberties and the Constitution because of the way things are portrayed in the media."

**I**N LATE NOVEMBER, DERRICK SHAREEF pleaded guilty to attempting to use a weapon of mass destruction. Because of the video evidence against him, Shareef couldn't use a legal defense of entrapment. But in court, he said he had been "coerced into doing things and trapped into doing things." In Rockford, not long before his guilty plea, there was a FOR SALE sign on the small house where Shareef once lived. The house