

**Prepared Statement of Ranking Member  
Senator Susan M. Collins**

**“A Ticking Time Bomb: Counterterrorism Lessons from the U.S.  
Government’s Failure to Prevent the Fort Hood Attack”**

**February 15, 2010**

**I join Senator Lieberman in welcoming Sergeant Lunsford, who was wounded in the Fort Hood terrorist attack, and the family and friends of others who lost their lives.**

**Thank you for being here. You have our sincerest sympathy for your losses. Throughout our investigation, we have kept you and the loved ones you lost in our thoughts.**

**One half day. About four hours. This was the amount of time that the Washington Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF) spent determining whether a military officer in communication with a known terrorist suspect amounted to a national security threat. Underlying threat information was not shared with the Department of Defense. Additional investigative steps were not taken, even when the JTTF responsible for the lead called the investigation “slim” and pressed for more action.**

**This hasty decision to close the investigation cost the government its last, best chance to identify the violent radicalization of Major Nidal Hasan . . . the last, best chance to potentially prevent the November 2009 massacre at Fort Hood.**

**But well before this failure by the FBI, DoD had enough information regarding Hasan’s violent radicalization to have disciplined or discharged him under existing personnel and extremism policies. Hasan’s extremist actions at Walter Reed were well known to supervisors and colleagues. His poor medical performance also was evident. Yet DoD took no action – laying the foundation for the FBI’s cursory investigation which relied, in part, on Hasan’s inadequate and misleading officer evaluations.**

**Our report’s conclusion is alarming: DoD and the FBI collectively had sufficient information to have detected Major Hasan’s radicalization to violent Islamist extremism, but they failed to act effectively on the many red flags signaling that he had become a potential threat.**

**This Committee has been investigating the Fort Hood attack since it happened more than a year ago. But the report we released almost two weeks ago is informed by a broader set of experiences: from our more than four-year investigation of homegrown terrorism to our efforts to pass comprehensive intelligence reforms following the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks.**

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**That is why it is so disturbing to see some of the same information sharing and coordination failures that led to the 9/11 attacks show up again in the inadequate investigation of Hasan before the Fort Hood attack.**

**An array of failures by both DoD and the FBI undermined efforts to identify Hasan as a threat. Detecting homegrown terrorists, particularly lone wolves like Hasan, is an enormous challenge under the best of circumstances. Nevertheless, we cannot allow systematic flaws like those revealed in our report to make this urgent challenge even more difficult.**

**Almost 10 years after 9/11, our report shows that more progress must be made to ensure intelligence and law enforcement officials communicate and collaborate effectively.**

**Our investigative report details deficiencies in DoD personnel practices and threat awareness. Despite some progress and the vision and leadership of Director Mueller, our report also reveals an FBI culture that is reluctant to share threat information or coordinate investigations with outside agencies, and, as a consequence, is underprepared to respond to the homegrown terrorist threat.**

**Among the several findings and recommendations in our report, there are four key observations that I would like to highlight:**

***1. The Administration refuses to acknowledge that violent Islamist extremism is the ideology that fuels attacks.***

**In homeland security strategies and policy guidance modified in the wake of the Fort Hood attack, the Administration still has been unwilling to identify violent Islamist extremism as the basis for the homegrown terrorist threat. For example, DoD's updated personnel policies speak merely of "workplace" violence - failing to specifically confront the violent Islamist extremism that inspired the Fort Hood attack. This stands in stark contrast to past DoD policies that directly addressed such threats as gang-related activity and white supremacy.**

**To understand a threat and counter it, we must identify our enemy. We must not shy away from making this distinction. Doing so could allow potentially violent actors to cloak their activities as acceptable behavior, or worse, expose those lawfully exercising their rights to unwarranted investigative intrusions.**

***2. The FBI cannot go it alone, and its Joint Terrorism Task Forces cannot become another intelligence stovepipe.***

**The JTTFs are an effective *model* for coordinating equities across law enforcement and the intelligence community and all levels of government. Indeed, good work by JTTFs has helped preempt attacks in the United States. But hard working law enforcement and intelligence officials should succeed *because* the JTTF system supports their coordinated efforts, not in spite of**

flaws in JTTF operations that could undermine them.

Too often JTTFs are seen primarily as augmenting FBI efforts. Task force officers detailed from outside the FBI are not given clear guidance on how and when to share information with their home agencies. Moreover, as occurred in the Hasan case, the investigative and operational interests of other entities are often not considered once the FBI has made its decision regarding whether information shows a threat or not.

***3. Detecting and disrupting homegrown terrorism require sustained leadership from the Attorney General, the Secretary of Homeland Security, and the Director of National Intelligence and active coordination across federal, state, and local lines.***

Homegrown threats can evolve rapidly and provide few investigative leads between radicalization and attack.

Although the government had the information needed to further investigate Hasan, no single entity pulled this information together to take action.

To help identify future homegrown threats, including from lone wolves like Hasan, we must coordinate carefully at all levels of government and ensure that possible threat information obtained by one component is shared effectively with the entity in the best position to take action against the threat. Co-location can enable effective interagency coordination, but it is not a proxy for that coordination.

***4. The United States Government must develop and implement a strategy to confront the violent Islamist ideology that fuels terrorism.***

To effectively prevent terrorism, the government must directly counter the ideology that supports it. We cannot simply rely on law enforcement and intelligence tools to disrupt the threat.

Identifying factors that lead to violent radicalization, understanding behaviors that could be indicators of radicalization to violence, and engaging to stop the violent radicalization process are all vital components of a comprehensive counterterrorism strategy. But the government's efforts in this regard are nascent.

Almost 10 years after 9/11 and despite clear progress at reform, we continue to see the need for improvements in our counterterrorism efforts, from information sharing to operational coordination. The Administration must use the Committee's report and the memory of the Fort Hood massacre and recommit to the collaborative principles Chairman Lieberman and I set forth in our 2004 intelligence reform law. The families of the victims deserve no less than our steadfast commitment to that goal.