



United States Senate
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
Chairman Joseph I. Lieberman, ID-Conn.

FORT HOOD PRESS CONFERENCE STATEMENT

Chairman Joe Lieberman

February 3, 2011

Good afternoon and thanks to everyone for coming. Today, Senator Collins and I are releasing our report on the Fort Hood terrorist attack that killed 13 people and injured 32 others on November 5, 2009.

We're very proud of the report and grateful to our bipartisan staff that carried out the report, which we embrace today. The staff led by Committee staff director Mike Alexander and his team Gordon Lederman, Charlie Martel, and Seamus Hughes. The minority staff director Brandon Milhorn was a full partner in this endeavor and others Senator Collins will name in her statement.

The point is that they all worked very long and hard on this investigation, but the most important point is that the product of their labor, this report, presents the most comprehensive understanding yet of the massacre at Fort Hood and enables us to make recommendations, particularly to the Department of Defense and the FBI, about how they and we can work together to better combat radicalization to violent Islamist extremism among people, like Nidal Hasan, inside America and to prevent anything like the murders at Fort Hood from happening again.

Throughout our investigation, the victims of this attack, and their families, have weighed heavily on our minds because our report's painful conclusion is that the Fort Hood massacre could have, and should have, been prevented.

We have reached that conclusion because our investigation found that employees of the Department of Defense and the FBI had compelling evidence of Nidal Hasan's growing embrace of violent Islamist extremism in the years before the attack that should have caused them to discharge him from the U.S. military and make him the subject of an aggressive counterterrorism investigation.

For instance, two associates at Walter Reed Army Medical Center called Hasan a – quote – “ticking time bomb” and a supervisor said he was – quote – “our worst.” But, instead of disciplining him or removing him from the military altogether, they inexplicably promoted him and outrageously suggested that the evidence of his radicalization showed a knowledge of Islam that could benefit our military and our country, instead of showing that he was a clear and present danger to our military and our country.

The FBI learned of Hasan's communications with a suspected terrorist who was involved in anti-American activities and was, himself, the subject of a major ongoing FBI terrorism investigation. The FBI has asked us not to identify this individual. The media has reached a conclusion that the individual is Anwar al-Awlaki, the American citizen, radical cleric, and terrorist who is now in Yemen. Suffice to say that based on the evidence I've seen this was not just one of thousands of stray pieces of evidence that comes to the FBI. It was a serious piece of evidence that required the most serious and urgent investigation. But what followed was a lackadaisical investigation of Hasan by the FBI, coupled with internal disagreements and a failure to use effective intelligence analysis that led the Bureau to end its inquiry into Hasan prematurely, thereby contributing to the government's failure to prevent the attack at Fort Hood.

In other words, the FBI actually had information that a member of the U.S. military was in communication with a target of their own serious investigation and did not pursue its investigation of that lead or notify the Defense Department.

In reading the report, you will see a number of redactions. For three months now, our staff has been in difficult and often frustrating negotiations with the law enforcement and intelligence communities of our government over their proposed classifications and redactions. Although some of our objections have led to withdrawals of requests for redactions, we still believe that some of the remaining redactions are unjustified. Nevertheless, we have consented to these out of respect for the law enforcement and intelligence communities and in order to produce this report in a timely manner, confident that the remaining redactions do not diminish our findings or our recommendations.

With that said, let me describe some of the evidence we found that should have flashed like red warning lights for Hasan's military colleagues and superiors, and the FBI.

First let me talk about the Department of Defense. From 2003 to 2009, when Hasan was a psychiatric resident at Walter Reed and a fellow in a military post-residency graduate program, he openly suggested that revenge might be a defense for the terrorist attacks of 9/11.

He openly sympathized with violent Islamist extremists and defended Osama bin Laden.

He justified suicide bombers; said U.S. military operations represented a war against Islam; stated that one of the risks of having Muslims in the U.S. military was that they might commit fratricide of their fellow service members; and publicly said that he had an allegiance to his religion that was greater than his allegiance to the U.S. Constitution, which as a military officer, he had sworn to uphold.

It is infuriating to me that a member of our Armed Forces who expressed such radical opinions to other members of our military was not discharged. Hasan's words made him not just a "ticking time bomb" but a traitor.

To quote from our report: "The officers who kept Hasan in the military and moved him steadily along knew full well of his problematic behavior. As the officer who assigned Hasan to Fort Hood (and later decided to deploy Hasan to Afghanistan) admitted to an officer at Fort Hood, 'you're getting our worst.'" End quote.

The most astounding reason Hasan's superiors in the Army gave for not taking action against him was that Hasan could provide an understanding of violent Islamist extremism and the culture of Islam. His Officer Evaluation Reports were thereby sanitized to turn his radicalization to violent Islamist extremism into a virtue, as if he was benefiting the U.S. Army with his radical beliefs.

For example, an evaluation report covering July 2007 to June 2008 said his work on the role of culture and Islamic faith in the context of terrorism, quote, "has extraordinary potential to inform national policy and military strategy." End of quote.

Let me now turn to the FBI's role. The FBI under Director Mueller has made substantial progress since 9/11 in transforming itself into America's lead counterterrorism organization. But in this case, unfortunately, the FBI also had the opportunity to take actions that would have prevented the Fort Hood murders and failed to do so.

The FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force in San Diego flagged Hasan's initial communications with the suspected terrorist I've referred to for review and transferred the communications to the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force here in Washington, because Hasan was located here at Walter Reed.

The Washington Joint Terrorism Task Force waited six weeks to assign the case and then it was assigned to a DOD detailee to the Task Force, who then waited three months before producing a cursory report that from evidence we've gathered took him all of four hours to write. That report explained Hasan's communications with the suspected terrorist as research based on the sanitized and misleading Officer Evaluation Reports of Hasan from Walter Reed.

The FBI's inquiry was limited, focused only on whether Hasan was engaged in plotting a terrorist attack, not whether or not his communications might be evidence he might be radicalizing towards violent Islamist extremism in a way that could well lead to an attack. In sum, the FBI conducted a superficial inquiry and ended it prematurely.

The San Diego Joint Terrorism Task Force was upset with the way the Washington Task Force handled the case but they too dropped the matter. FBI headquarters –specifically the National Joint Terrorism Task Force and Counterterrorism Division - never got involved in the investigation, although these two parts of FBI headquarters are responsible for overseeing the Bureau’s counterterrorism work.

As we say in our report, “The Fort Hood attack was a warning that the FBI’s transformation remains a work in progress and that the FBI must accelerate its transformation – particularly given the growing complexity and diversity of the homegrown terrorist threat.”

Our investigation also reaffirmed what we have known since the 9/11 Commission reached the following fundamental conclusion in its seminal report in the summer of 2004: America’s enemy today is not terrorism or a particular terrorist organization or a particular religion.

The enemy is the ideology, the political ideology, of violent Islamist extremism. Despite the remarkable work of America’s military, intelligence, and law enforcement organizations and personnel in pushing back the forces of terrorism and preventing individual terrorist attacks since 9/11, the ideology that inspired 9/11 and other attacks and plots around the world continues to motivate individuals to commit terrorism, and that now increasingly includes Americans inside and outside America, people we refer to now as homegrown terrorists.

We must take strong new steps – urgently and with the same sense of purpose we all felt following the 9/11 attacks – to identify and combat the ideology of violent Islamist extremism and to prevent the terrorist attacks against Americans which that ideology causes. In our report, we make the following recommendations:

- DOD policies against extremism among service members must be finally, explicitly described and confront violent Islamist extremism. The Department of Defense can no longer be subsumed within vague, inexact, and politically correct words like “violent extremism” or “workplace violence.” It is violent Islamist extremism.
- Second, our military must clearly differentiate between violent Islamist extremism and protected religious observance, particularly those by Muslims. That way, the thousands of Muslim-Americans who serve our country honorably in the American military every day and in other ways will be protected from suspicion for practicing their religion.
- Military employment evaluations and personnel records must accurately and candidly describe performance and behavior or military personnel will pose threats to other members of our military and the public, as was the case in the Hasan case.
- The FBI needs to bring its 56 field offices more effectively under the FBI headquarters’ leadership. In the Hasan case, two field offices disagreed concerning the inquiry into Hasan, but FBI headquarters never stepped in to resolve the dispute and ensure that the evidence on Hasan received the urgent and aggressive attention it deserved.
- The FBI needs to do more to make certain that its Joint Terrorism Task Forces more effectively share information and coordinate operations with other federal, state, and local agencies. In the Hasan case, DOD was not informed of the FBI’s inquiry into Hasan even though a service member radicalizing to violent Islamist extremism clearly posed a threat to our military and our country.
- The FBI should take steps to make sure the large number of intelligence analysts it has hired since 9/11 are used effectively. That was not the case in regards to Hasan.
- Finally, and most broadly, our government must develop a more comprehensive national strategy to counter domestic radicalization to Islamist extremism. We have not adequately defined the roles and responsibilities of agencies of our government and other institutions of our society that must effectively counter radicalization to violent Islamist extremism in our country. And of course that works must be done with leaders of the American-Muslim communities.

Thirteen innocent people were killed at Fort Hood. To honor their memory, we pledge to use this report and its recommendations as a blueprint to ensure the appropriate reforms are adopted quickly so the next human

“ticking time bomb” will be identified early and defused before another deadly detonation. We believe this report and its recommendation are particularly timely given the dramatic increase in homegrown terrorist plots against America and Americans over the past two years.

Senator Collins and I today are transmitting this report to the Secretary of Defense, the Director of the FBI, the Director of National Intelligence, and the Homeland Security and Counterterrorism Advisor at the National Security Council with our request that they respond to our findings, questions and recommendations as soon as possible. We are also sending a copy of the report to the President for his review. Senator Collins?