



Department of Justice

STATEMENT OF

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BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES SENATE

AT A HEARING ENTITLED

“NINE YEARS AFTER 9/11:
CONFRONTING THE TERRORIST THREAT TO THE HOMELAND”

PRESENTED

SEPTEMBER 22, 2010



**Statement of
Robert S. Mueller III
Director
Federal Bureau of Investigation**

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**At a Hearing Entitled
“Nine Years after 9/11: Confronting the Terrorist Threat to the Homeland”**

September 22, 2010

Good morning, Chairman Lieberman, Senator Collins, and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the terrorist threats facing our nation and the efforts of the FBI to protect the United States from future terrorist attacks.

The FBI’s number one priority continues to be the prevention of terrorist attacks against the United States. To meet this mission, we have undergone a paradigm shift in the way we collect and use intelligence. Intelligence drives our investigative strategies, enhancing our understanding of national security threats and our ability to address these threats. Today, the FBI is a stronger organization, combining our national security and law enforcement capabilities while upholding the Constitution and protecting civil liberties.

Since 9/11, many of the terrorist threats facing the United States endure, but some are also evolving and transforming in ways that present new challenges. Despite significant counterterrorism pressure abroad, al-Qa’ida remains committed to advancing attack plans directed at the West, including plans against Europe and the Homeland. The group’s efforts to recruit, train, and deploy operatives to execute attacks worldwide, but specifically in the United States, were demonstrated with the arrest of Najibullah Zazi, who was plotting to attack the New York City subway system. Groups affiliated with al-Qa’ida are now actively targeting the United States and looking to use Americans or Westerners who are able to remain undetected by heightened security measures—as seen with the attempted airline bombing on Christmas Day 2009 and the failed car bombing in New York’s Times Square in May. In addition, it appears domestic radicalization and homegrown extremism is becoming more pronounced, based on the number of disruptions and incidents.

Recent National Security Threats

The FBI has faced and disrupted an extraordinary range of national security threats since the Committee's hearing last year on the terrorist threat. We structure all of our investigations to maximize the intelligence that can be gained from them. Drawing on our intelligence and law enforcement tools, we strategically decide where and when to disrupt and dismantle these threats. Intelligence, in turn, drives investigative strategies to ensure our resources are targeting and collecting on the most pressing threats. The investigation of Najibullah Zazi is an example of how the FBI used its intelligence and law enforcement tools to collect valuable intelligence on a subject's network. Zazi was arrested in September 2009 and on February 22, 2010 pleaded guilty to terrorism charges related to his plans to attack the New York City subway system. His two New York-based associates were indicted in January 2010.

Also in September of last year, FBI Special Agents arrested Michael C. Finton in Illinois and Hosam Smadi in Texas for unrelated bomb plots. The FBI used online undercover FBI agents and confidential human sources who continuously monitored the activities of these violent extremist subjects up to the time of their arrests.

U.S. citizen David Headley was arrested in October 2009 in Chicago for planning terrorist attacks against a Danish newspaper and two of its employees. During the course of this investigation, the FBI collected intelligence that uncovered Headley's operational role in the 2008 attacks in Mumbai, India, and connected him to a separate plot to kill an individual in Denmark. On January 14, 2010, a superseding indictment was filed against Headley relating to his conspiring with others to plan and execute attacks in both Denmark and India, and in March 2010, he pleaded guilty on all counts.

In January 2010, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab was charged in a six-count criminal indictment for his alleged role in the attempted Christmas Day bombing of Northwest Airlines flight 253 from Amsterdam to Detroit. Within days of the Christmas Day attack, the FBI established a Yemen fusion cell to coordinate intelligence and counterterrorism assets in response to al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula's (AQAP's) threat to the United States homeland and United States interests overseas. The FBI gained critical intelligence from the questioning of Abdulmutallab and shared all relevant information with our partners in the intelligence and law enforcement communities.

In May 2010, Faisal Shahzad attempted to detonate a car bomb in Times Square, an attack for which Tehrik-e-Taliban in Pakistan (TTP) claimed responsibility. The FBI forensics and technical experts developed crucial evidence aiding this fast-moving terrorism investigation. Equally important, the intelligence gained from this investigation was voluminous and significant, and shared expeditiously with our domestic and foreign partners.

Threats to the Homeland

These threats are merely a sampling of the intelligence we collected and terrorist plots the FBI disrupted during the past year. But they underscore the diversity of the threats facing the

Homeland and a troubling trend: the rise in U.S.-specific threats. In the past year, the United States has been center stage as the focus for a number of terrorist plots that primarily come from three sources: core al-Qa'ida, al-Qa'ida's affiliates, and homegrown extremists.

Al-Qa'ida

Since the 2001 terrorist attacks, al-Qa'ida's intent to conduct high-profile attacks inside the United States has been unwavering. Recent investigations reveal that the group has adapted its strategy for conducting such attacks. In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, al-Qa'ida's plots and plans primarily focused on using individuals from the Middle East or South Asia for such attacks. More recent plots—beginning in August 2006 with the attempted plan to commit attacks against U.S.-bound aircraft using improvised explosives devices—suggest al-Qa'ida is also putting more emphasis on finding recruits or trainees from the West to play key roles for these Homeland-specific operations.

The 2009 plot led by Najibullah Zazi to attack the New York subway was the first known instance since 9/11 that al-Qa'ida had successfully deployed a trained operative into the United States. The fact that Zazi and his associates had access to the United States and were familiar with the environment here from an operational security and targeting perspective demonstrates how al-Qa'ida can leverage Americans. The potential exists for al-Qa'ida to use and train other Americans for additional Homeland attacks. Identifying these individuals is among the FBI's highest counterterrorism priorities.

Al-Qa'ida Affiliates and Allies

We are also concerned by the growing threat to the West posed by al-Qa'ida affiliates and allies. Al-Qa'ida continues to exert its influence over these extremist organizations around the world, and we are increasingly concerned about the potential for some of these groups—operating in countries like Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, and Iraq—to focus more on Homeland attacks in the coming years. Several changes this past year suggest this Homeland-specific agenda may be rising in prominence: collaboration and cooperation between some groups; two attempted attacks on the U.S. Homeland; and the number of American extremists who have traveled, or sought to travel, overseas to fight or train with such groups.

The level of cooperation among al-Qa'ida and other terrorist groups has changed in the past year, suggesting that this collaboration and resulting threat to the Homeland will increase. By sharing financial resources, training, tactical and operational expertise, and recruits, these groups have been able to withstand significant counterterrorism pressure from United States, coalition, and local government forces.

The failed attempt by Faizal Shahzad to detonate a vehicle rigged with explosive devices in Times Square in May 2010 was the first time we had seen TTP, a Pakistan-based terrorist group, expand its operational focus from attacks within its immediate region to plotting attacks against the U.S. Homeland.

The attempted Christmas Day bombing of the Northwest flight to Detroit also represented the first time AQAP attempted an attack against the United States already having demonstrated its ability to target U.S. interests in Yemen. Much like al-Qa'ida, AQAP was able to identify a willing recruit who was committed to attacking the United States and whose background did not raise traditional security scrutiny. Like core al-Qa'ida's use of Zazi, TTP's use of Shazhad—a naturalized U.S. citizen who had lived for years in the United States—to attempt to attack the Homeland underscores the operational roles Americans can play for al-Qa'ida and its affiliates.

The number of persons from the United States who attempted to travel overseas to various conflict zones to receive terrorist training or combat experience during the past year also poses a challenge. While the motivations for such travel are diverse, as are the backgrounds of the individuals we see interested in such opportunities, we remain concerned about this development. Once Americans are able to travel overseas and make the right connections with extremists on the ground, they could be targeted for participation in Homeland-specific attack plans, as happened in the cases of Zazi and Shahzad.

In particular, Somalia has garnered the attention of many American extremists, as at least two dozen Americans have successfully made it there to train or fight over the past few years. Recent disruptions inside the United States show that some Americans still desire to travel there to receive training or even fight on behalf of al-Shabaab, a designated terrorist organization.

Homegrown Extremism and Radicalization

Threats from homegrown violent extremists—those who have lived primarily inside the United States and commit acts of violence in furtherance of objectives promoted by a foreign terrorist organization, but who acts without direction from a foreign terrorist organization—remain a concern. Like Finton and Smadi, these individuals are inspired by the global jihadist movement to commit violent acts in the United States and may use the Internet to connect with other extremists, but do not necessarily receive direct guidance from terrorist groups overseas.

During the past year, the threat from radicalization has evolved. A number of disruptions occurred involving extremists from a diverse set of backgrounds, geographic locations, life experiences, and motivating factors that propelled them along their separate radicalization pathways. Beyond the sheer number of disruptions and arrests that have come to light, homegrown extremists are increasingly more savvy, harder to detect, and able to connect with other extremists overseas

Although no single factor helps to explain why the radicalization phenomenon now may be more pronounced inside the United States, several factors may be important in assisting our efforts to understand the current dynamic. The attraction of foreign conflict zones to American extremists is significant, and we have already seen a number of Americans travel overseas for extremist purposes. While difficult to measure, it is possible more American extremists are feeling increasingly disenchanted with living in the United States or angry about U.S. and Western

foreign policy, making their decision to leave for extremist opportunities abroad all the more appealing. The increase in extremist propaganda in English may also have an impact.

Moreover, as the Internet continues to shape the way American society engages in so much of our daily lives and routines, so too has it had a profound impact on the radicalization dynamic. The Internet has expanded as a platform for spreading extremist propaganda, a tool for online recruiting, and a medium for social networking with like-minded violent extremists, all of which may be contributing to the pronounced state of radicalization inside the United States.

Addressing the Threat

Addressing our most critical threats requires a holistic picture and understanding of the threat environment at home and abroad. To enhance this understanding, the FBI issued 24 threat priorities, designed to help the FBI focus its resources on the development of a uniform national domain awareness and intelligence collection strategy. These priorities do not replace the eight operational priorities that have been in place since 2002; instead, they focus on sub-program threats that will help the FBI prioritize intelligence activities within each of the operational priorities.

Input from FBI field offices on the threats within their domain will continue to inform the national picture of these threats—their presence, intent and capabilities, our source penetration and liaison contacts who can provide intelligence—and the focus and potential impact of our current investigations.

A key focus in the coming year will be using this understanding to develop national operational strategies to stay ahead of trends and protect our nation from the threat of terrorist radicalization in the United States.

Partnerships and Outreach

Our partnerships with local law enforcement are critical in gaining an understanding of the threat environment and protecting our nation and its citizens. In more than 100 locations nationwide, our Joint Terrorism Task Forces (JTTFs)—composed of members from local, state, tribal, and federal law enforcement and intelligence agencies—share information and conduct operations to prevent and dismantle terrorist plots. The FBI, in coordination with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), is committed to having a nationwide approach to participating in state and local fusion centers.

The FBI, the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), and DHS have joined together on an initiative to enhance our collective understanding of homegrown violent extremism in the United States. The effort leverages the key capabilities of the law enforcement community and includes enhanced information sharing, training, and analysis.

The FBI is also collaborating with DHS to issue joint intelligence products on radicalization to federal, state, local, and tribal law enforcement personnel.

Intelligence-driven investigations also require a unity of effort with our partners overseas. Global cooperation is necessary to combat terrorism, and through more than 60 Legal Attaché offices around the world, the FBI has strengthened relationships with our international partners and expanded our global reach. The FBI's assistance in investigating the recent bombings in Uganda provided greater insight and understanding of international terrorist networks that pose a threat to the United States.

Finally, the FBI understands that protecting America requires the cooperation and understanding of the public. Since the 9/11 attacks, the FBI has developed an extensive outreach program to Muslim, South Asian, and Sikh communities to develop trust, address concerns, and dispel myths in those communities about the FBI and the U.S. Government. As part of this effort, in 2009 the FBI established the Specialized Community Outreach Team (SCOT), composed of Special Agents, Analysts, Community Outreach Specialists, and personnel with language or other specialized skills. This team assists field offices with establishing new contacts in key communities.

Events in Minneapolis, involving U.S. persons being recruited in Somali-American communities to travel overseas and fight with the Somali-based terrorist group al-Shabaab, provided the opportunity to implement a pilot SCOT program. Representatives of the SCOT deployed to a select number of cities that have a high ethnic Somali population. These personnel bring a cultural awareness and sensitivity to the community and a professionalism that facilitates the first steps of engagement with local leaders, who have welcomed the opportunity. SCOT also provides recommendations to the field office for engagement strategy within the community. This program's methodology can be implemented proactively with all communities.

Conclusion

Chairman Lieberman and Ranking Member Collins, I would like to conclude by thanking you and this Committee for your service and support. The FBI is in a better position to understand the threats facing the Homeland than we were even a year ago. Since 9/11, the FBI has evolved to meet the shifting terrorist threat. We must never stop evolving, but we can say that nine years later, our analysis is deeper, our operations more sophisticated, and our knowledge more three-dimensional.

For 100 years, FBI employees have dedicated themselves to safeguarding justice, to upholding the rule of law, and to defending freedom. On behalf of the men and women of the FBI, I look forward to working with you to enhance the capabilities needed to protect the United States.