

**Statement of
Senator Susan M. Collins**

“Ten Years After 9/11: A Report From the 9/11 Commission Chairmen”

March 30, 2011

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This year, we will commemorate the worst attack ever on the United States. In doing so, we must ask ourselves, “Are we safer?” Or, are we just safer from the tactics the terrorists already have tried?

Is our intelligence community better at fitting together these complex puzzle pieces? Or have we just been lucky? Are we anticipating the next threat, such as a cyber attack or the use of poisons, or are we just looking backwards, reacting to previous plots?

Undoubtedly, compared to where we were on 9-10-2001, we have greatly improved the framework for information sharing among our intelligence and law enforcement agencies. But sometimes it has been an inept bombmaker or a faulty fuse that has spared American lives.

Once again, the two extraordinary leaders of the landmark 9-11 Commission, Lee Hamilton and Tom Kean, are appearing before our Committee as we evaluate our progress. In September of last year, their “Assessing the Terrorist Threat” report warned of an increasingly wide range of U.S.-based militants who do not fit any particular ethnic, economic, educational or social profile.

The American melting pot, the report said, “has not provided a firewall against the radicalization and recruitment of American citizens and residents, though it has arguably lulled us into a sense of complacency that homegrown terrorism couldn’t happen in the United States.”

This report correctly called 2009 a watershed year in U.S.-based terrorist plots, with 43 American citizens or residents aligned with violent Islamist extremists charged or convicted of terrorist crimes that year alone.

This Committee first sounded the alarm about home-based terrorism five years ago and has held 15 hearings on the topic. We found that individuals within the United States, in both our prison system and our communities, are being inspired by al-Qaeda’s violent ideology to plan and execute attacks, often acting as “lone wolves” without direct orders from al-Qaeda.

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The Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004, which Senator Lieberman and I authored, did much to improve the management and performance of our intelligence, homeland security, and law enforcement agencies. This most sweeping reform of our nation's intelligence community since just after World War II would not have happened without the leadership of our witnesses and the advocacy of the families of the victims. That increased collaboration and information sharing have helped our nation prevent numerous attacks.

There have been untold successes. In many cases, the intelligence community and law enforcement have quietly connected the dots and thwarted plots. In other cases, alert citizens reported suspicious behavior to authorities.

Challenges still remain, however. We continue to see troubling examples of a pre-September 11th, stove-piped mindset from some of our intelligence and law enforcement officers. For example, as documented in our Committee's recent report on the Fort Hood attack, the Army and the FBI collectively had more than enough information to have detected Major Hasan's radicalization to violent Islamist extremism, but they failed to act on the many red flags signaling that he had become a potential threat.

Major Hasan and others seem to find motivation and ideas online. Technology is transforming our culture, our economy, and our world in many beneficial ways. Yet, we must also be aware that terrorists seek to exploit the Internet's potential as well. We have witnessed recently that the Internet can serve as a platform for extremist propaganda on the one hand and peaceful revolution on the other.

Other Commission recommendations have not yet come to fruition. In particular, we must make more progress in enhancing first responder communications.

Gaps also remain at our borders and in our cargo inspection system. As the news today indicates, the potential to plant an explosive somewhere in the millions of pieces of air cargo shipped around the world daily is a real vulnerability.

It is also troubling that the Border Patrol does not have the ability to detect illegal activity across approximately three-quarters of the northern border. DHS must continue to work toward a balance that opens the border to our friends, while closing it to those who would do us harm.

Nonetheless, there have been real accomplishments—the biometric system for screening foreign nationals seeking to enter the United States, the creation of a consolidated terrorist watch list, and the dedicated DHS and state and local law enforcement employees deserve recognition.

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Even in these areas of progress, improvements are needed. Biometric screening should be expanded to include foreign nationals *leaving* the U.S. Screening technology must be improved to keep up with changing threats and to ensure that the safest possible screening equipment is deployed.

I hope this year we can expand protection against lawsuits for citizens who report suspicious behavior indicating potential terrorist activity. We also must pass legislation to ensure the key U.S. intelligence officials are consulted following a foreign terrorist's detention in the United States.

Finally, I continue to have deep concerns that this Administration refuses to acknowledge that violent Islamist extremism is the ideology that fuels such attacks. The Administration should have an overarching national strategy to counter this growing threat.

Ten years ago, nearly 3,000 lives were lost. We cannot become complacent or let down our guard when every single intelligence briefing that I've ever attended always warns that the enemy remains determined to attack our country.

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