

Statement of
Senator Susan M. Collins

“The Fort Hood Attack: A Preliminary Assessment”

Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
November 19, 2009

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In investigating the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, the Commission led by Tom Kean and Lee Hamilton discovered vital information scattered throughout the government, confined by agency silos, that might have prevented the deaths and destruction of that terrible day if only the dots had been connected.

In the wake of the mass murder at Fort Hood, we once again must confront a troubling question: Was this another failure to connect the dots?

Much has been done since 9-11-01 to respond to the failures exposed by those attacks. We created the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), additional Joint Terrorism Task Forces, and fusion centers. We revised information sharing policies and promoted greater cooperation among intelligence and law enforcement agencies.

And the results have been significant. Terrorist plots, both at home and abroad, have been thwarted. The recent arrest of Najibullah Zazi demonstrates the benefits of information sharing and joint efforts by the NCTC and other intelligence agencies, as well as federal, state, and local law enforcement.

But the shootings at Fort Hood may indicate that communication failures and poor judgment calls can defeat systems intended to ensure that vital information is shared to protect our country and its citizens. This case also raises questions about whether or not restrictive rules have a chilling effect on the legitimate dissemination of information, making it too difficult to connect the dots that would have allowed a clear picture of the threat to emerge.

These are overarching questions that we will explore with our expert witnesses today.

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Our ongoing investigation will also seek answers to questions specific to the Fort Hood case. For example, how did our intelligence community and law enforcement agencies handle intercepted communications between Major Hasan and a radical cleric and known al Qaeda associate? Did they contact anyone in Major Hasan's chain of command to relay concerns? Did they seek to interview Major Hasan himself?

When Major Hasan reportedly began to openly question the oath that he had taken to support and defend the Constitution of the United States, did anyone in his military chain of command intervene?

When Major Hasan, in his presentation at Walter Reed in 2007, recommended that the Department of Defense allow "Muslim soldiers the option of being released as 'conscientious objectors' to increase troop morale and decrease adverse events," did his colleagues and superior officers view this statement as a red flag?

Were numerous warning signs ignored because the Army faces a shortage of psychiatrists and was concerned, as the Army Chief of Staff has subsequently put it, about a "backlash against Muslim soldiers?"

These are all questions that we will seek to answer.

For nearly four years, this Committee has been investigating the threat of homegrown terrorism. We have explored radicalization in our prisons, the cycle of violent radicalization, and how the Internet can act as a "virtual terrorist training camp." We have warned that individuals within the United States can be inspired by al Qaeda's violent ideology to plan and execute attacks even if they do not receive direct orders from al Qaeda to do so. And we have learned of the difficulty of detecting "lone wolf" terrorists.

To prevent future homegrown terrorist attacks, we must understand why our law enforcement, intelligence agencies, and our military personnel system may have failed in this case.

Major Hasan's attack targeted innocent soldiers and civilians regardless of their religious faith. These patriotic soldiers and civilians were injured and killed not on a foreign battleground but rather on what should have been safe and secure American territory.

With so many questions still swirling around this heinous attack, it is important for the nation to understand what happened so that we may work

to prevent future incidents. We owe that to our troops, to their families and communities, and to all Americans.

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