



United States Senate

Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

Chairman Joseph I. Lieberman, ID-Conn.

Opening Statement of Chairman Joseph Lieberman

“A Ticking Time Bomb:

Counterterrorism Lessons From the U.S. Government’s Failure to Prevent the Fort Hood Attack”

Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee

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As Prepared for Delivery

Good morning. Two weeks ago, Senator Collins and I issued a report based on our investigation into the Fort Hood massacre that left 13 innocent people dead and 32 others wounded. Our report – entitled “A Ticking Time Bomb; Counterterrorism Lessons from the U.S. Government’s Failure to Prevent the Fort Hood Attack” – found that the attack was preventable. The Department of Defense (DoD) missed several opportunities to reprimand and discharge Army Major Nidal Hasan for his growing embrace of violent Islamist extremism, and the FBI neglected to investigate him thoroughly after it learned he – a member of the United States Armed Forces – was communicating with a suspected terrorist already under FBI investigation.

More broadly, our investigation uncovered a troubling lack of awareness among some government officials about violent Islamist extremism, the ideology that inspires it, its signs and manifestations, and how to confront it. Today, the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee will hear reactions to our report’s findings and recommendations and discuss how our government must proceed if it is to prevent future homegrown terrorism and the loss of innocent American life at the hands of violent Islamist extremists.

I want to take a moment to recognize, welcome, and honor several members of the audience who lost loved ones at Fort Hood and one who was wounded, himself.

Kerry Cahill and Keely Vanacker, the daughters of the late Michael Cahill traveled to Washington from Texas and Louisiana to be at our hearing today. Angela Rivera, the wife of the late Major Eduardo Caraveo, is here from Woodbridge, Virginia, with her mother and sister. Charlotte Warman, the stepdaughter of the late Lieutenant Colonel Juanita Warman, is here from Bethesda, Maryland. And Sergeant Alonzo M. Lunsford is here with his wife. Sergeant Lunsford was shot five times on that tragic day, and miraculously survived. We are deeply sorry for your losses and hope that we can honor the memory of those you have lost, and all the Fort Hood victims by instituting reforms to prevent the next “ticking time bomb” from destroying more innocent lives.

We have two of the federal government’s most experienced counterterrorism experts as witnesses today. Charlie Allen was the first Under Secretary of Homeland Security for Intelligence and Analysis and Chief Intelligence Officer and before that had been a top counterterrorism official at the CIA. Phil Mudd is a former CIA analyst and was the FBI’s first deputy director for national security.

Our discussion of flaws within the military will be informed by the testimony of retired Vice Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army and four-star General John Keane. Samuel Rascoff - Assistant Professor of Law at the New York University School of Law and former director of the New York Police Department’s intelligence analysis unit - brings the local government and academic perspectives to the discussion. Thank you all for making the time to be with us today.

When we launched our investigation of Fort Hood in November of 2009, our purpose was to determine what the federal government knew about Hasan's activities in the years and months before the shooting so that we could close whatever security gaps existed and try to prevent a future attack.

What was so infuriating about our investigation was that Hasan's superiors in the Army knew of his provocative, violent, and anti-American statements and, instead of discharging him, promoted him, and sanitized his personnel records to twist his radicalization into a virtue.

And the FBI knew Hasan was communicating with a suspected terrorist already under investigation. But the Bureau never contacted the Army about Hasan. Instead, the FBI conducted a superficial inquiry that concluded Hasan's communications with the suspected terrorist amounted to academic research.

These failures point to systemic problems within the military and the nation's domestic counterterrorism structures. The DoD, for example, still doesn't specifically address violent Islamist extremism in its policies and procedures, even though it is violent Islamist extremism that the Armed Forces have been at war with in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere in the world. Our investigation concluded that the FBI has not completed its transformation from an organization that investigates crimes to one that uses and produces intelligence to counter terrorism. Nor has the FBI yet fully found the right balance between its headquarter's need to integrate the work of its field offices and the autonomous nature of those field offices.

The shortcomings within DoD can be remedied with stronger policies and better training about violent Islamist extremism, as we recommend in our report. Although the FBI has made substantial progress since 9/11, which is indicated by several successes in stopping terrorists in our country, the Ft. Hood case makes clear that the FBI needs to accelerate its transformation into America's lead domestic counterterrorism organization by increasing the use of intelligence analysts and taking other steps we recommend in our report.

If we are to defeat our enemy, we must know and understand that enemy. Violent Islamist extremism is our enemy, and government officials, as well as ordinary citizens must accept that fact and work to defeat it. That is the best way to isolate the enemy and to distinguish these Islamist terrorists from the vast majority of peace-loving Muslim-Americans who abhor violence.

Despite the remarkable efforts by America's military, intelligence, and law enforcement agencies to fight terrorism since September 11, 2001, violent Islamist extremism continues to draw converts, and those converts increasingly include Americans.

Ten years after 9/11 our government must understand the ideology behind violent Islamist extremism and develop a more comprehensive national strategy with defined agency roles and responsibilities to prevent counter its spread.

I look forward to the testimony of our witnesses today and the discussion that will follow. Thank you.
Senator Collins?