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**Testimony on  
“A Ticking Time Bomb: Counterterrorism Lessons  
from the U.S. Government’s Failure to Prevent the Fort Hood Attack”**

**Before the  
United States Senate  
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs**

**15 February 2011**

Chairman Lieberman, Ranking Member Collins, and Distinguished Committee members, I am honored to speak again to this Committee. I also want to acknowledge the presence at this hearing of Ms. Kerry Cahill and Ms. Keely Vanacker, whose father, Micahel Cahill, a Department of Defense civilian who was murdered at Fort Hood. I retired in April 2009 from government service after fifty-one years of work in intelligence. I am proud of the years that I was able to serve my country, and I hope that I can provide some insights on the vital issues that will be covered in today's hearing.

The focus of today's hearing is on the murder of twelve service members and one DoD civilian employee at Fort Hood, Texas, by Major Nidal Malik Hasan, a US Army officer and psychiatrist. A central issue of the hearing, however, is the potential in this country for the growth of violent ideological Islamist extremism. I commend the Committee's objective: straight-forward treatment of ideological Islamic extremism and the potential for it to increase.

### **The Ideology of Violent Islamist Extremism and Homegrown Radicalization**

I found the section of the Committee's Special Report on violent ideological Islamic extremism to be in accord with views that I have held since I began working on al Qa'ida in 1998 as the Assistant Director of Central Intelligence for Collection at CIA. The report carefully and correctly delineates the ideology of violent Islamist extremism—that of al Qa'ida, its affiliates, and those inspired by the ideology—from belief in the religion of Islam and its practice.

I am concerned, however, by details in the report on the extraordinary deference given to Major Hasan by his superiors as he repeatedly persisted in studying "violent Islamist extremism" in ways that suggested that he endorsed extremism under some circumstances including the use of suicide operations. I have no direct knowledge of the facts relating to Major Hasan other than what I have read in the press and in this Committee's report so I will not comment further on the oversight of Major Hasan by his superiors, other than to note that "political correctness" at times seemed to prevail over common sense.

The United States—with global allies—successfully continue their relentless efforts to disrupt, dismantle, defeat, and destroy al Qa'ida leadership in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan and affiliated networks globally. This effort has achieved significant success: half of al Qa'ida's central leadership has been captured or killed and a number of affiliated extremist networks are deeply damaged or destroyed. No large-scale in-bound terrorist attack has occurred in the United States since 9/11. Many extremist plots have been uncovered and foiled as result of both foreign and domestic intelligence and investigative efforts. However battered its leadership, al Qa'ida remains determined to conduct attacks against the United States that will result in mass casualties, damage US critical infrastructure, and—above all—inflict permanent damage to the psyche of the American people.

One new factor, however, has come to the fore—a surge in homegrown extremism here in the West, both in Europe and in North America. The growth of radicalization in the United States, especially among Muslim youth, in 2009 and 2010 has set off "alarm bells" and prompted calls for greater action against violent Islamic extremism. According to a RAND Corporation study published in 2010, there were 46 publicly reported cases of radicalization and recruitment to jihadist terrorism in the United

States between 11 September 2001 and the end of 2009. Only 125 persons were identified in the 46 cases. Importantly, however, 13 of these cases occurred in 2009, up from an average of about four cases a year from 2002 to 2008. While the figures do not include hundreds of others who may be or have been under investigations, the number of individuals charged with involvement in terrorism over the last ten years is quite small. But the growth of cases over the last two years is disturbing. According to statistics in the Committee's report "from May 2009 to November 2010, there were 22 different homegrown plots, contrasted with 21 such plots from September 2001 to May 2009." A sample of recent arrests shows deadly intent, for example:

- The arrest on 26 November 2010 of Mohamed Osman Mohamud in Portland, Oregon, for attempting to detonate what he thought was a car bomb at a Christmas tree-lighting ceremony; and,
- The arrest of Antonio Martinez, also known as Mohammed Hussein, in Baltimore for conspiring with individuals, whom he believed were fellow terrorists, to detonate a vehicle filled with explosives parked outside of an armed forces recruiting center.

Both of these cases were FBI "stings," but these cases and others are remarkably similar. The individuals were self-inspired and self-motivated; they were not directed from al Qa'ida "central" or from al Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). The persons charged were all US citizens or held legal immigrations status. The central theme of each plot involved placing explosives in areas that would cause significant casualties to innocent Americans. The two events are stark reminders of the potent threat posed by homegrown radicalization.

Western Europe is a primary area where homegrown terrorism, encouraged or inspired by al Qa'ida, has grown as well in recent years. There have been a number of plots involving individuals who have become radicalized, some of whom reportedly were preparing to stage Mumbai-style attacking in urban areas. The fear of another Mumbai-type attack in Europe prompted the Department of State to issue "a travel alert" last October, warning of possible attacks on Europe's transportation systems and tourist attractions. We are familiar with the numerous Islamic networks that have been mapped by security services in the United Kingdom and the large number of extremists who are deemed as potentially capable of committing acts of violence. What is new are the recent events on the continent. Early in December 2010, an Iraqi-born Swede blew himself up in central Stockholm, injuring two bystanders in the country's first major terrorist act in years. In November, police arrested eleven suspects in Belgium. In late December 2010 five men were arrested in Denmark and Sweden who were plotting a terrorist attack using weapons. Danish Security and Intelligence Service officers stated that the arrests came after an extensive investigation undertaken with the Swedish Security Service.

British authorities arrested nine men in December 2010 on terrorism charges, stating that the individuals found inspiration and bomb-making instructions in al Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula's (AQAP's) INSPIRE on-line electronic journal. INSPIRE, as the Committee's report explains, is an electronic journal written in easy to understand English as opposed to the heavily ideological statements normally found on jihadist websites. INSPIRE appears to emanate from the leadership of Anwar al-Aulaqi, the US-born extremist cleric and AQAP operative of Yemeni parents. This electronic

magazine has the potential to trigger young and alienated Muslims to commit acts of violence here in North America—Canada as well as the United States.

Again, your report points out, one cannot overstate the power of the Internet in fueling the growth of radicalization in the United States. The spread of Salafist Internet sites is providing religious justification for attacks that are increasingly aggressive and espouse violent anti-Western rhetoric and actions by local groups. The Internet is the primary media by which al Qa'ida markets its messages on literally hundreds of websites, commanding Muslims to either kill or support the killing of US citizens to defend Islam against the United States. Although hiding out in the wilds of Yemen, al- Aulaki's voice is still heard. On 9 November 2010, he issued a new video in which his message to Muslims was direct and simple—"kill Americans."

In assessing the threat within the United States, we must keep our perspective while carefully gauging future trends. The Pew Research Center pointed out in a major study in May 2007 that American Muslims overwhelmingly are decidedly American in outlook, values, and attitudes. They believe that hard work pays off in US society. This belief is reflected in Muslim American income and education levels, which generally mirror those of the general public. Moreover, according to this report, Muslim Americans by nearly a two-to-one margin do not see a conflict between being a devout Muslim and living in a modern society.

My concerns, however, are over a tiny minority of Muslims, a number of whom are converts to Islam and who remain strongly linked with Islamic countries overseas where extremist groups are flourishing. Many of these newer immigrants have arrived in the United States over the last fifteen to twenty years as refugees and asylum seekers. Some have become strongly attracted to anti-Western and especially anti-US forces in their countries of origin. The tensions may be reflected in the belief held by many in Muslim countries that "the United States is at war with Islam." Al Qa'ida continues to benefit from the broader narrative that "the West" is attacking Islam, despite the fact that the overwhelming majority of innocents killed by al Qa'ida or affiliates since 9/11 have been Muslim.

This affinity with violent groups abroad is reflected, for example, in a number of immigrants from Somalia, who have arrived in substantial numbers in the United States since the early 1990s when we intervened under the aegis of the United Nations to alleviate a major humanitarian crisis. Somali immigrants coming to the United States have found assimilation difficult. Many retain significant family and clan linkages to Somalia, where a civil war continues to rage between Al Shabaab and the UN-backed Transitional National Government (TNG). A small number of first-generation of Somali youth, now naturalized Americans, have found their way back to Somalia to take up arms for al Shabaab, which continues in its attempts to crush the TNG. We have reason for equal concern about second-generation Somalis, naturally born American citizens, some of whom also appear influenced by the same Imams that influenced the first generation.

To date, the self-radicalized cells detected in the United States have lacked the level of sophistication, experience, and access to resources of terrorist cells overseas. Their efforts, when disrupted, largely have been in the nascent phase and law enforcement authorities were able to take

advantage of poor operational tradecraft. Even when the act of terrorism has not been detected, the efforts have fortunately been amateurish in most cases, such as the Time Square attempted bombing last May. However, the growing use of the Internet to identify and connect throughout the world offers opportunities to build relationships and to gain expertise that previously were available only in overseas training camps. It is likely that individual cells will use information on destructive tactics that are widely available on the Internet to boost their destructive capabilities.

### **Committee's Findings and Recommendations on the Fort Hood Attack**

My comments on the Fort Hood murders are not based on direct knowledge of the event, given that I left government six months before it occurred. But my views on terrorism and government efforts to combat it are based on experience gained over many years of work on counterterrorism, first at CIA and then as the Under Secretary for Intelligence and Analysis at DHS. First, I agree strongly with the Committee's report in praising the work of the military, the FBI, and intelligence agencies in disrupting and preventing "in-bound" attacks from al Qa'ida and its associates; I worked as a senior government official on this threat. We have not had a successful al Qa'ida or affiliate attack here in the United States since 9/11; this is a remarkable record and reflects the dedicated work of tens of thousands of Americans in intelligence, law enforcement, and defense. Many plots, as the Committee notes, have been disrupted and individuals arrested.

But I also strongly believe the Committee is accurate in its statement that there is "the need for a more comprehensive and coordinated approach to counter radicalization and homegrown terrorism across all agencies, including federal, state, and local entities, which are critical to keeping our country safe." It is here that I wish to direct my remarks because on a broader scale, I believe this complex issue must be addressed if we are to counter successfully longer-term radicalization in the United States. Fault lines across the federal, state, and local governments remain on information sharing and building trust among counterterrorism authorities and, until we make substantial further improvement in integrating our efforts and developing trust, we will continue to have risk in countering terrorism, especially that emanating from Islamic extremists.

Over the last several years, we have talked about "an integrated national intelligence enterprise" but we are far from one on which we have firm resolution. A national enterprise would involve not just information sharing but also increased intelligence collection and analysis in accordance with federal, state, and local authorities and laws. There is, for example, no unified national intelligence collection plan or even a recognized set of national intelligence requirements relating to domestic terrorism. Moreover, we do not have a current in-depth, national intelligence estimate on domestic terrorist threats. The FBI's National Security Branch, DHS' Office of Intelligence and Analysis, and state and local law enforcement all have major responsibilities in countering radicalization and in ferreting out extremist cells. Over all, they have done an outstanding job but their work is far from integrated—there are still too many seams.

### **Federal Law Enforcement**

The FBI is the country's primary domestic intelligence agency and has the responsibility to prevent and investigate acts of terrorism. It operates today radically different from where it was on 9/11. It has formed a National Security Branch with an Intelligence Directorate at FBI Headquarters that focuses on counterterrorism. It has created Field Intelligence Groups (FIGs) whose mission is to analyze raw intelligence and share it with the Intelligence Community and local law enforcement. There is a FIG in each of the FBI's 56 field offices. In addition, there are over a hundred Joint Terrorism Task Forces (JTTFs), which focuses full-time on preventing attacks and conducting counterterrorism investigations and are staffed by FBI agents and employees from other federal, state, and local agencies. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, for example, has over 200 personnel positioned within JTTFs. JTTFs operate at the Top Secret/Special Compartmented Information (TS/SCI) classification level.

A frequent criticism of the FBI's domestic intelligence efforts is that it remains "case oriented" and finds it difficult to collect intelligence where there is not a case for prosecution. The Bureau rejects this characterization. Director Muller has committed the FBI to becoming an intelligence-driven organization when it comes to countering counterterrorism. Discussions that I have had with prominent law enforcement officials at the local level suggest that the Bureau's transformation is still incomplete. The FBI's reluctance to fully embrace local law enforcement authorities continues to be a source of friction. In my view, local police departments also need to lean forward to partner with the FBI and to pass on information they have that could lead to terrorism investigations. This is a two-way street that works far better than it did a few years ago but one that will require "constant gardening" on the part of both parties.

### **DHS Intelligence**

DHS intelligence is vital to countering domestic terrorism, but it is still in an early stage of development. With several hundred analysts and with contractor support, it is preparing analytic assessments on terrorist developments, threats relating to the use of weapons of mass destruction, protection of US critical infrastructure, and finally radicalization. It produces analytic intelligence threat assessments for the Department and for state and local governments. As this Committee knows, it is a vital link between the Intelligence Community and local authorities, but its role and mission is only gradually being defined. Its sharing of intelligence through to fusion centers, now numbering 72, is vital. The number of intelligence reports flowing from DHS to the fusion centers and to local law enforcement is impressive and frequently serves to inform on terrorist threats and terrorist tactics, techniques, and methods. DHS can harvest the products produced by the fusion centers and local police departments but it does not direct the collection of that intelligence, and its links with local police departments is far from comprehensive. A great responsibility of DHS is to raise the capabilities and quality of the intelligence analysts in the fusion centers; currently, many fusion centers analysts have had little or no analytic tradecraft training. DHS intelligence is working this issue but its efforts need to be linked directly to DHS grant funds administered elsewhere in the Department. DHS intelligence has greatly enhanced its relationship with the FBI's National Security Branch, and many joint intelligence assessments are produced that go to state and local governments and law enforcement.

### **Fusion Centers/Local Police Departments**

If we are to combat domestic terrorism, both state fusion centers and local police will have to be viewed as vital to our counterterrorism efforts. Fusion centers vary greatly in their focus and capabilities; they principally are concerned with threats and issues relating to their local community or region; created at the state and city level in response to 9/11, they have morphed in many cases into “all threats, all hazards centers,” yet terrorism remains a focus of their endeavors. Some fusion centers are very mature and have significant capabilities. Others are in nascent stages of development. Many fusion center personnel have little experience or training in intelligence. Some endeavor to collect intelligence relating to terrorism, others are not pro-active. Others, however, not only work hard to share intelligence but also collaborate with local law enforcement to collect terrorism-related intelligence on extremist activities in their communities. They all, to one extent or the other, conduct open-source intelligence, harvest local information, and assist in analysis. With some state and local governments under fiscal pressure, budget cuts to the centers are inevitable. A number of fusion centers will have difficult surviving without substantial federal grant funds. They do have the opportunity to grow in sophistication and become more directly involved in ferreting out possible homegrown terrorism. As the fusion centers federal partner, DHS has a strong responsibility to work with the fusion centers to strengthen their intelligence gathering and analytic capabilities; training of fusion center personnel should be one of DHS’ highest priorities.

### **Role of Local Police Departments**

Local police departments are not yet utilized effectively as part of the overall national intelligence effort, even though they are extraordinarily well-positioned to combat homegrown terrorism. Their ethnic composition provides them with access to locally diverse populations. They know their towns and cities and are responsive to their city councils. Many local police departments, however, lack the human capital to keep abreast of what is happening in their own communities. Some collect intelligence and have intelligence units; many officers in these units, however, lack training in intelligence and work primarily as law enforcement officers. Police intelligence efforts are not coordinated, either nationally or laterally. When local police departments acquire information that warrants investigation involving potential terrorism, they can enlist the FBI through the JTFs, although that often means abdicating the leader in investigations. But local police departments can investigate suspicious activities that do not meet the thresholds of JTFs—the “green shoots” that are still short of imminent criminal cases. Like fusion centers, local police departments are not fully used in combating terrorism and, above all, local police are better positioned than federal authorities to conduct community policing—reaching out to local communities and diasporas. The intent would be not intelligence but to build trust with diverse local communities.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

We now have compelling evidence that a small number of Americans or legally permitted residents are embracing an ideology of violent Islamic extremism. A number of plots have been detected and disrupted, preventing the murder of innocent Americans. Countering these threats effectively will require continued improvement to US intelligence and law enforcement activities as well as strategies to counter violent Islamic ideology which, to a large degree, must come primarily from local

communities. I have never believed that the answer to countering extremism lies in Washington. Based on the Committee's detailed research and findings, it is evident that there were serious mistakes made that might have prevented in the murders at Fort Hood.

- The Department of Defense does not yet have a doctrine or strategy for dealing effectively with the potential for Islamic extremism in the military services, although it clearly is moving to meet this challenge, while ensuring military personnel have full freedom of religious worship, regardless of faith. Given its history of resolving challenging issues, there is every reason to believe that DoD will develop the doctrine and strategies required; it can never, however, allow "political correctness" to override the development and implementation of a comprehensive strategy for dealing with potential violent extremism among its ranks.
- Both DoD and the FBI had sufficient information between them—if acted upon—to have taken actions to prevent the attack by Major Hassan, but problems of security clearance levels and information sharing precluded either from having a total view of the potential threat posed by Major Nidal. The DoD officer assigned to one of the JTTFs never had access to all of the sensitive information involving Major Hasan's communications with a "suspected terrorist." Communications by any US military personnel, officer or enlisted, with a terrorist should have set off alarm bells in both the Bureau and DoD. Having many years working closely with the military and for several years directly for three-star military officer, I can personally attest that the US military always endeavors to hold itself to the highest standards.
- Protection of highly sensitive sources and methods is fundamental to the US Intelligence Community, including sensitive intelligence sources of the FBI. Nonetheless, it is crucial that personnel assigned to JTTFs from other agencies such as DoD have "systems high" clearances if needed to perform their jobs effectively. There have been other cases of failure in information sharing and excessive compartmentation that have contributed to casualties in the struggle against terrorism.
- The FBI, under the strong leadership of Director Mueller, is changing the Bureau into an agency that is responsive to national intelligence security priorities, and above all, to the threat of terrorism. The progress made is remarkable, not only in developing a new model for counterterrorism operations but in changing the Bureau's culture. Yet the transformation is incomplete. The FBI has approximately 2,600 intelligence analysts, but they are not fully integrated with the special agents and are still not utilized to the extent needed in anticipating potential acts of terrorism. I have every expectation that the current transformation will continue, accelerated by the events at Fort Hood. Nonetheless, the Bureau will have to demonstrate further that it is moving from its historic case-driven model to one that embraces intelligence as its leading edge.
- The JTTFs need to be more effective in their interactions among themselves and, in my view, the National Security Branch of the FBI needs to be fully cognizant of any potential terrorism leads that become more than "green shoots." The JTTFs decentralized model should be examined to ensure that FBI Headquarters' counterterrorism leaders are more directly involved in potential terrorism leads that could pose risks and the need for more intelligence collection.



In addition to the above comments on the findings of the Fort Hood Special Report, I would like to offer the following thoughts for the Committee's consideration. These are my thoughts, though informed by individuals whom I respect, and address areas that need further exploration if we are to counter extremism, while always ensuring that laws relating to privacy, civil liberties, and civil rights are honored.

- With the direct support of the DNI, define what "an integrated national intelligence enterprise" is and how analysis and collection can be enhanced, in accordance with federal, state, and local authorities and laws.
- Under the aegis of the DNI, develop national intelligence requirements relating to domestic terrorism; determine what are the priority needs of federal, state, and local authorities within the limits imposed by privacy, civil rights, and civil liberties of all Americans. In my view, DHS intelligence should undertake this effort with its federal, state, and local partners.
- Under the DNI and with assistance from DHS and the FBI, prepare a current in-depth, national intelligence estimate on domestic threats, with special emphasis on the growth of radicalization within the United States.

Finally, assuming we are serious in addressing the growth of radicalization in the homeland, it is crucial that we do this objectively and with a clear vision of the potential risks of intruding on the civil rights and liberties of all Americans; this cannot be permitted to occur. I do not see more legislation as necessary here; government at the federal, state, and local levels have all of the authorities needed under existing legislation to combat homegrown terrorism. It is now up to the Congress and the Administration to determine how to proceed. I would like to add one word of strong caution, however. Neither defense nor intelligence nor law enforcement will forever prevent all attacks upon our country; the odds are simply against it. But, as a society, we must show resiliency in the face of such attacks. Resilient societies respond and recover and only grow stronger when attacked. We must be that type of society.

Charles E. Allen