



Department of Justice

STATEMENT OF
ROBERT S. MUELLER, III
DIRECTOR
FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES SENATE

AT A HEARING ENTITLED
“EIGHT YEARS AFTER 9/11: CONFRONTING THE TERRORIST THREAT TO THE
HOMELAND”

PRESENTED
SEPTEMBER 30, 2009

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Good morning, Chairman Lieberman, Ranking Member Collins, and members of the Committee. I appreciate the opportunity to be here today to discuss the terrorist threats facing our nation and the efforts of the FBI to protect the United States from future terrorist attacks.

After the attacks of September 11, 2001, the FBI's priorities shifted dramatically as we charted a new course, with national security at the forefront of our mission. The eight years since have seen significant changes at the FBI, and we have made progress. Today, the FBI is a stronger organization, combining greater capabilities with a longstanding commitment to the security of the United States, while at the same time upholding the Constitution and protecting civil liberties.

The nature of the terrorist threat facing the United States has also changed over these last eight years. A significant evolution in the problem of terrorism is the threat posed by those who believe in al-Qaeda's ideology, since it was in part created twenty years ago to spread a revolutionary idea. Today, while we still face threats from al-Qaeda, and many of its affiliated groups, we also face a challenge in dealing with homegrown extremists in the United States who while not formally part of these terrorist organizations, believe in their ideologies and wish to harm the United States in furtherance of it. This requires us to develop an understanding of a diffuse and evolving threat environment and to leverage our unique authorities as both a national security service and a law enforcement organization.

Al-Qaeda

Since the 2001 terrorist attacks, we have frequently received credible reports that al-Qaeda remains committed to attacking the United States and US interests abroad. Al-Qaeda's primary threat continues to come from the tribal areas of Pakistan and Afghanistan, but we are seeing persistent activity elsewhere, from Europe to the Horn of Africa and Yemen. Of

particular concern to the FBI are individuals who can travel with fewer restrictions to these areas of extremist activity and then enter the United States under less scrutiny.

Fortunately, the success of US military and intelligence operations combined with the work of our allies around the world has diminished al-Qaeda's core external operational capabilities. The elimination of key al-Qaeda figures, decline in its capacity to train recruits safely, disruptions in travel routes, reduction of terrorist financing, and the dwindling of safehavens have all reduced the ability of al-Qaeda to attack the Homeland. The FBI continues to monitor, collect intelligence, and investigate al-Qaeda's reach into the United States.

Affiliated Groups

Some affiliated groups that traditionally had only local agendas have formally joined ranks with al-Qaeda and expanded their operational focus regionally, or even globally, which may include attacks inside the United States. Strong networks have formed that encompass the shifting desire of followers to engage more directly with al-Qaeda and al-Qaeda's vision of violent jihad.

Some of these militant groups have physically re-located closer to core al-Qaeda in Pakistan and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) with a refocused attack strategy against coalition troops in Afghanistan and Pakistan and against western interests in the region. Factions of militant groups have executed spectacular attacks within the borders of India to inflame tensions between Pakistan and India. Components more closely aligned with al-Qaeda demonstrated their intent and capability to attack western interests through the November 2008 Mumbai attacks and the September 2008 Marriott Hotel truck bombing in Islamabad. Other groups have formed in the Arabian Peninsula and North Africa, while affiliates in Somalia, Central Asia, and Iraq are also of concern for their potential to broaden their targeting focus.

The increased role of militant factions in al-Qaeda operational activities poses the FBI with two problems. First, al-Qaeda has a new pipeline of individuals to continue filling its ranks with recruits who may develop into operational leaders to conduct future attacks against the Homeland and western interests abroad. Second, the involvement of these militant groups presents us with greater difficulties in identifying the enemy. Motivated US persons who reach militant training camps in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and other conflict zones have a potential doorway to involvement in core al-Qaeda operational activities.

Homegrown Radicalization

Since 2001, the emergence of individuals and groups inspired by al-Qaeda rhetoric but sometimes lacking the capabilities to launch a spectacular, large-scale attack poses a growing Homeland challenge. The threat from homegrown violent extremists remains a top terrorism concern for the FBI, but quantifying the threat and assessing the capabilities of these individuals is difficult. While the intent and capability of homegrown extremists varies widely, several FBI

terrorism subjects, with no known nexus to overseas extremist networks or groups, have taken steps to move from violent rhetoric to action.

I do not remember a time when these types of loose networks were not a part of my morning briefing. In May 2009, US citizen James Cromitie and three other individuals were arrested for plotting to detonate explosives near a Jewish community center and synagogue. As alleged in the indictment/complaint, they also planned to attack military planes at the New York Air National Guard Base with an anti-aircraft missile system. Cromitie had reportedly been upset about the war in Afghanistan and had expressed interest in doing "something to America." In December 2008, five individuals, inspired by al-Qaeda, were convicted on conspiracy and weapons charges for plotting to conduct a small arms attack against soldiers stationed at the Fort Dix Army Base in New Jersey. Members of the group conducted surveillance, obtained a map of the base, participated in firearms training, and acquired weapons in preparation for the attack.

Trends in Radicalization

Overseas Travel

The role of returning foreign fighters to the United States changes the nature of the threat to the Homeland. Individuals inside the United States with foreign fighter experience and a network of extremist contacts overseas can encounter and encourage other like-minded individuals with a strong desire to engage in violence but lack the skills and resources to do so. We have learned that it can take years before individuals with foreign fighter experience begin to develop a radicalization network.

In July 2009, the FBI disrupted a conspiracy by a US citizen and others in the Raleigh, North Carolina-area to recruit and help young men travel overseas in order to participate in extremist activities. As articulated in the indictment, Daniel Boyd received military-style training in terrorist camps during the 1989 through 1992 timeframe for the purpose of engaging in violent jihad. Following this training, he allegedly fought in Afghanistan and then returned to the United States. Part of the conspiracy involved radicalizing mostly young Muslims or converts to Islam to believe in the idea that violent jihad was a personal obligation on the part of every good Muslim. The conspiracy also consisted of training in weapons, financing, and assistance in arranging overseas travel and contacts so that others could participate in violence.

We know individuals have been recruited to travel to Somalia to fight or train on behalf of al-Shabaab. While there are no current indicators that any of the individuals who went to Somalia have been selected, trained, or tasked by al-Shabaab or other extremists to conduct attacks inside the United States, the FBI remains concerned about this possibility.

Individuals who attend overseas madrassas or religious institutions located in terrorist safe havens, such as in the northern regions of Yemen and Pakistan, are at risk of being radicalized or recruited by terrorist organizations. The growing number of individuals in the United States with connections to these types of institutions also provides an indirect means for

those inspired by extremist rhetoric—but who lack the necessary contacts to increase their participation in violent actions—to become more engaged.

Role of the Internet and Social Networking

The Internet also remains a powerful conduit for radicalization efforts. Al-Qaeda effectively uses the Internet to spread its message through statements for consumption by anyone with access to an Internet connection. The ability to exert global influence through cyberspace further contributes to the amorphous nature of the threat facing the Homeland by affording individuals access and anonymity within a self-reinforcing extremist environment. Individuals can also find like-minded extremists using chat rooms and social networking sites, enhancing their ability to develop global networks of extremist contacts.

In August 2009, an Atlanta jury heard about a cluster of extremists who had formed a loose on-line network connecting individuals in North America, Europe, and South Asia. US citizen Ehsanul Sadequee was found guilty of conspiracy to provide material support to terrorists after he and another American, Syed Ahmed, made contact in chat rooms with like-minded individuals and proceeded to plan attacks, conduct surveillance of potential target sites within the United States, and pursue overseas training.

Addressing the Threat

The FBI's national security mission is to lead and coordinate intelligence efforts that drive actions to protect the United States from the increasingly diffuse terrorism threat that has evolved since 2001. Our goals are to develop a comprehensive understanding of the threats and penetrate national and transnational networks that have a desire and capability to harm us. To be successful, we must understand the threat, continue to integrate our intelligence and law enforcement capabilities in every FBI operational program, and expand our contribution to the Intelligence Community knowledge base.

The FBI's plan is to understand the threats not only to disrupt plots but to dismantle networks so they no longer pose a threat. We want an intelligence picture of a network that is complete enough for us to avoid leaving any pieces of the network operating after we take action. Moving from simply understanding a case to mapping loose networks of associates can take months or years. Targeted intelligence-gathering takes time, and requires patience, precision, and dedication. The process is labor-intensive and often does not provide a clear picture quickly, but it is at the core of understanding the threats facing the Homeland. Yet even the best intelligence will not provide complete certainty, given the evolving nature of the threats facing the Homeland.

In January 2009, the FBI released a classified intelligence assessment on national security and criminal threats to the Homeland. This assessment provided the FBI's strategic perspective on national security and criminal threats related to core FBI priorities, trends, patterns, and themes. In addition to our work inside the FBI, we integrated our intelligence program with

other agencies under the Director of National Intelligence, with appropriate protections for privacy and civil liberties. Operationally, FBI agents work with a range of counterparts across the Intelligence Community. Information regarding analysis and operations is shared routinely and continuously, and up to the highest levels of decision-makers in various agencies. Once we gain an understanding of the threats facing us through intelligence, the FBI's law enforcement authorities allow us to move against individuals and networks. We are not an intelligence service that collects, but does not act; nor are we a law enforcement service that acts without knowledge.

Today's FBI combines the capability to understand the breadth and scope of threats with the capability to dismantle those same threats. A significant step in this evolution is the Strategic Execution Team (SET), which we established in 2007 to help us assess our intelligence programs and standardize them throughout the FBI. The SET, made up of analysts and agents, developed a series of recommendations for accelerating the integration of our intelligence and investigative work. The SET improvements ensure that we capitalize on our intelligence collection capabilities and develop national collection plans to fill gaps in our knowledge base.

Our Field Intelligence Groups (FIGs) were also restructured in every field office across the country to ensure each is able to identify, assess, and attack emerging threats. Following SET's recommendations, the FIGs now conform to one model, based on best practices from the field, and adapted to the size and complexity of each office. Each FIG has well-defined requirements for intelligence gathering, analysis, use, and production. Managers are accountable for ensuring that intelligence production is of high quality, timely, and relevant not only to their communities, but to the larger intelligence and law enforcement communities. As a result of these changes, the analysts and agents in the FIGs collect intelligence more completely, analyze it more quickly, share it more widely with others who need the information, and take action on it more effectively. The FIGs can better coordinate with each other, Headquarters, law enforcement, and intelligence partners. With this integrated model, we can turn information and intelligence into knowledge and action.

As the FBI has evolved structurally to meet modern challenges, we have also advanced our technological and scientific ability to conduct investigations. To meet the global nature of the threat, a number of current initiatives allow us to capture and share actionable intelligence. The Terrorist Explosive Device Analytical Center (TEDAC) is addressing the threat of improvised explosive devices through technical and forensic exploitation. The information and intelligence derived from this analysis is used to provide intelligence for both military force protection and homeland security. The Next Generation Identification Biometric Database will allow modern biometric data, combined with traditional fingerprints, to assist in the identification of individuals. In 2006, the FBI established a Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) Directorate which includes a strong forensic program for all aspects of WMD and traditional forensic expertise. The FBI Laboratory Division is central in our support to interagency efforts and members of the Intelligence Community in nuclear forensics and other scientific endeavors.

Partnerships and Outreach

The role of our law enforcement partners is critical to protecting our nation and its citizens. Our Joint Terrorism Task Forces (JTTFs) are in more than 100 locations nationwide. These multi-agency task forces are comprised of local, state, and federal law enforcement and intelligence agencies that share information and conduct operations to prevent and dismantle terrorist plots. The FBI is also committed to participation in all leading statewide fusion centers, select Multi-Agency Intelligence Centers, and the Antiterrorism Advisory Councils in federal judicial districts.

In 2009, the FBI began operating a threat tracking system for state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies to share information with a potential nexus to terrorism. This tracking system, called eGuardian, provides a central location for law enforcement suspicious activity reporting in an unclassified environment. By engaging in close partnerships with our state and local colleagues we are better positioned to share and receive intelligence, thus optimizing our ability to respond to emerging threats at the federal, state, and local levels.

In response to three ideologically-driven murders in the United States, in which the perpetrators demonstrated Lone Offender characteristics and had previous FBI contact, the FBI initiated the Lone Offender Task Force in 2009. In partnership with other government agencies and comprised of approximately 25 personnel from FBI Headquarters and field offices, this initiative takes an introspective and proactive approach: a comprehensive review of open investigations where lone offender behavioral traits potentially apply and the development of new intelligence related to previously closed subjects who may meet some of the Lone Offender characteristics. By developing measures to identify the Lone Offender, we hope to proactively disrupt future threats.

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 Attache 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 November 2008 Mumbai attacks not only helped a key ally in the investigation and prosecution of a terror attack but also provided the FBI with greater insight and understanding of international terror networks that pose a threat to the United States.

Finally, the FBI understands that protecting America requires the cooperation and understanding of the public. The FBI has an extensive outreach program to Muslim, South Asian, and Sikh communities to address concerns and develop trust about the FBI and federal efforts to protect the Homeland. In December 2008, the FBI Office of Public Affairs deployed Specialized Community Outreach Teams to work with local FBI field offices, federal partners, municipal governments and non-profit organizations to engage the Somali diaspora. The FBI works closely with the Department of Homeland Security, the National Counterterrorism Center, and other Intelligence Community partners on community engagement efforts.

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. We must never stop evolving, but we can say today our analysis is deeper, our operations more sophisticated, and our knowledge more three-dimensional, and we have eight years of experience to back us up. While the threat of terrorism has become more diffuse and will continue to evolve, the FBI has changed accordingly and will continue to change to defeat the threats of the future. On behalf of the men and women of the FBI, I look forward to working with you in the years to come as we work together to enhance the capabilities needed to protect the United States.