

**Hearing before the
House Committee on Homeland Security
"Understanding the Homeland Threat Landscape – Considerations for the 112th Congress"
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Introduction

Chairman King, Ranking Member Thompson, distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity today to discuss the current state of the terrorist threat to the Homeland and the US Government's efforts to address the threat. I am pleased to join Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano here today—one of the National Counterterrorism Center's (NCTC) closest and most critical partners.

The past two years have highlighted the growing breadth of terrorism faced by the United States and our allies. Although we and our partners have made enormous strides in reducing some terrorist threats—most particularly in reducing the threat of a complex, catastrophic attack by al-Qa'ida's senior leadership in Pakistan—we continue to face a variety of threats from other corners. These of course include those commonly referred to as "homegrown terrorists" who have longstanding ties to the United States and who are often inspired by al Qa'ida's ideology. While these newer forms of threats are less likely to be of the same magnitude as the tragedy this nation suffered in September 2001, their breadth and simplicity make our work all the more difficult.

In response, and especially since the failed December 25 attack of 2009, the counterterrorism community broadly and NCTC specifically have pursued numerous reforms to reduce the threat to the American people and our allies. These reforms address a wide variety of areas, including prioritizing CT activities across the Intelligence Community, clarifying counterterrorism analytic responsibilities, and improving information integration. Perhaps most notably, NCTC created a new analytical effort, the Pursuit Group, to help track down tactical leads that can lead to the discovery of threats aimed against the Homeland or US interests abroad. None of these reforms are a panacea, but in combination I believe they reduce the likelihood of a successful attack.

Finally, while defending against current threats we must remain focused on denying al Qa'ida and its affiliates a new generation of recruits—especially in the homeland. In that light, NCTC has remained at the forefront of identifying, integrating, coordinating, and assessing efforts that aim to undercut the terrorism narrative and prevent the radicalization and mobilization of new additional terrorists.

Al-Qa'ida and its Allies in Pakistan Pose Threat Despite Degradation

While al-Qa'ida in Pakistan remains focused on conducting attacks in the West, the group must balance that intent with concerns for its security. Sustained CT pressure on al-Qa'ida in Pakistan has degraded the group's capabilities, leaving it at one of its weakest points in the past decade.

- During the past two years, al-Qa'ida's base of operations in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) has been restricted considerably, limiting its freedom of movement and ability to operate. The group has been forced to react continuously to personnel losses that are affecting the group's morale, command and control, and continuity of operations.

Al-Qa'ida continues to prize attacks against the US Homeland and our European allies above all else. We remain vigilant to the possibility that despite the degradation of the organization, al-Qa'ida already may have deployed operatives to the West for attacks. Al-Qa'ida's senior-most leaders—Usama Bin Ladin and Ayman al-Zawahiri—maintain al-Qa'ida's unity and strategic focus on US targets, especially prominent political, economic, and infrastructure targets.

- Europe is a key focus of al-Qa'ida plotting. At least five disrupted plots during the past five years—including a plan to attack airliners transiting between the United Kingdom and the United States, disrupted cells in the United Kingdom and Norway, and two disrupted plots to attack a newspaper office in Denmark—demonstrate al-Qa'ida's steadfast intentions.

We remain concerned about future Homeland attacks from one of al-Qa'ida's key allies in the FATA, Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), the group that trained the bomber who failed in his attempt in 2010 to detonate a bomb in Times Square. TTP is an alliance of militant groups that formed in 2007 with the intent of imposing its interpretation of sharia law in Pakistan and expelling the Coalition from Afghanistan. TTP leaders maintain close ties to senior al-Qa'ida leaders, providing critical support to al-Qa'ida in the FATA and sharing some of the same global violent extremist goals.

Other al-Qa'ida allies in Pakistan, the Haqqani network and Harakat-ul Jihad Islami (HUJI), have close ties to al-Qa'ida. Both groups have demonstrated the intent and capability to conduct attacks against US persons and targets in the region, and we are looking closely for any indicators of attack planning in the West.

Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LT)—another Pakistan-based Sunni extremist group—poses a threat to a range of interests in South Asia. Its previous attacks in Kashmir and India have had a

destabilizing effect on the region, increasing tensions and brinkmanship between New Delhi and Islamabad, and we are concerned that it is increasing its operational role in attacks against Coalition forces in Afghanistan. Although LT has not previously conducted attacks in the West, LT—or individuals who trained with LT in the past—could pose a threat to the Homeland and Europe, particularly if they were to collude with al-Qa’ida operatives or other like-minded terrorists.

The Increasing Threat From Al-Qa’ida’s Regional Affiliates

As al-Qa’ida’s affiliates continue to develop and evolve, the threat posed by many of these groups to US interests abroad and the Homeland has grown. The affiliates possess local roots and autonomous command structures and represent a talent pool that al-Qa’ida leadership may tap to augment operational efforts.

Al-Qa’ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). We continue to view Yemen as a key battleground and regional base of operations from which AQAP can plan attacks, train recruits, and facilitate the movement of operatives. We assess AQAP remains intent on conducting additional attacks targeting the Homeland and US interests overseas and will continue propaganda efforts designed to inspire like-minded individuals to conduct attacks in their home countries.

- AQAP has orchestrated many attacks in Yemen and expanded external operations to Saudi Arabia and the Homeland, including the assassination attempt on a Saudi Prince in August 2009, the attempted airliner attack during December 2009, and its follow-on effort to down two US-bound cargo planes in October 2010 using explosives-laden printer cartridges.
- Anwar al-Aulaqi, a dual U.S.-Yemeni citizen and a leader within AQAP, played a significant role in the attempted airliner attack and was designated in July as a specially designated global terrorist under E.O. 13224 by the US Government and the UN’s 1267 al-Qa’ida and Taliban Sanctions Committee. Al-Aulaqi’s familiarity with the West and his operational role in AQAP remain key concerns for us.
- AQAP’s use of a single operative using a prefabricated explosive device in their first attempted Homeland attack, and the lack of operatives associated with their second attempted attack, minimized its resource requirements and reduced visible signatures that often enable us to detect and disrupt plotting efforts.

Al-Qa’ida Operatives in East Africa and Al-Shabaab. East Africa remains a key operating area for al-Qa’ida associates and the Somalia-based terrorist and insurgent group al-Shabaab. Some al-Shabaab leaders share al-Qa’ida’s ideology, publicly praising Usama Bin Ladin and requesting further guidance from him, although Somali nationalist themes are also prevalent in their public statements and remain one of the primary motivations of rank and file members of al-Shabaab. The Somalia-based training program established by al-Shabaab and al-Qa’ida continues to

attract foreign fighters from across the globe, to include recruits from the United States. At least 20 US persons—the majority of whom are ethnic Somalis—have traveled to Somalia since 2006 to fight and train with al-Shabaab. In June and July 2010, four US citizens of non-Somali descent were arrested trying to travel to Somalia to join al-Shabaab.

- Omar Hammami, a US citizen who traveled to Somalia in 2006 and is now believed to be one of al-Shabaab’s most prominent foreign fighters, told the New York Times last year that the United States was a legitimate target for attack. The potential for Somali trainees to return to the United States or locations in the West to launch attacks and threaten Western interests remains a significant concern.
- This past year, al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for its first transnational attack outside of Somalia—the suicide bombings in Kampala, Uganda in July that killed 74 people including one American. Al-Shabaab leaders have vowed additional attacks in the region.

Al-Qa’ida in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). AQIM is a threat to US and other Western interests in North and West Africa, primarily through kidnap-for-ransom operations and small-arms attacks, though the group’s recent execution of several French hostages and first suicide bombing attack in Niger last year highlight AQIM’s potential attack range. Disrupted plotting against France and publicized support for Nigerian extremists reveal the group’s continuing aspirations to expand its influence. Sustained Algerian efforts against AQIM have significantly degraded the organization’s ability to conduct high-casualty attacks in the country and compelled the group to shift its operational focus from northern Algeria to the vast, ungoverned Sahel region in the south.

Al-Qa’ida in Iraq (AQI). Ongoing CT successes against AQI—to include the deaths of the group’s top two leaders last year in a joint Iraqi/US military operation—have continued to put pressure on the organization. However, despite these ongoing setbacks, AQI remains a key al-Qa’ida affiliate and has maintained a steady attack tempo within Iraq, serving as a disruptive influence in the Iraqi Government formation process and a threat to US forces. We are concerned that AQI remains committed to al-Qa’ida’s global agenda and intent on conducting external operations, to include in the US Homeland.

Homegrown Extremist Activity Remains Elevated

In addition to threats emanating from outside the country, we also remain concerned that homegrown violent extremists (HVEs) continue to pose an elevated threat to the Homeland. Plots disrupted in Washington, D.C., Oregon, Alaska, and Maryland during the past year were unrelated operationally, but indicate that the ideology espoused by al-Qa’ida and its adherents is motivating, or being used as a justification by, individuals to attack the Homeland. Key to this trend has been the development of a US-specific narrative, particularly in terrorist media

available on the Internet that motivates individuals to violence. This narrative—a blend of al-Qa’ida inspiration, perceived victimization, and glorification of past Homegrown plotting—addresses the unique concerns of like-minded, US-based individuals. HVEs continue to act independently and have yet to demonstrate the capability to conduct sophisticated attacks, but as Fort Hood shooter Nidal Hasan demonstrated, attacks need not be sophisticated to be deadly.

- Similar to 2009, arrests of HVEs in the United States in 2010 remained at elevated levels, with four plots disrupted in the Homeland. The individuals involved were motivated to carry out violence on the basis of a variety of personal rationales, underscoring the continued intent by some HVEs to take part in violence despite having no operational connections to terrorists overseas.
- Increasingly sophisticated English-language propaganda that provides extremists with guidance to carry out Homeland attacks remains easily accessible via the Internet. English-language web forums also foster a sense of community and further indoctrinate new recruits, both of which can lead to increased levels of violent activity.
- The prominent profiles of US citizens within overseas terrorist groups—such as Omar Hammami in al-Shabaab and Anwar al-Aulaqi in AQAP—may also provide young U.S.-based individuals with American role models in groups that in the past may have appeared foreign and inaccessible. These individuals have also provided encouragement for homegrown extremists to travel overseas and join terrorist organizations.

Al-Qa’ida and Affiliates Sustain Media Campaign

Al-Qa’ida senior leaders issued significantly fewer video and audio statements in 2010 than 2009. As previously, public al-Qa’ida statements rarely contained a specific threat or telegraphed attack planning, but they continue to provide a window into the group’s strategic intentions.

Al-Qa’ida spokesmen continued to call for violence against Western targets, including appeals last year for Muslims to conduct attacks on their own initiative, and they reiterated assertions that US outreach to Muslims is deceptive. Bin Ladin, al-Zawahiri, and American spokesman Adam Gadahn also released statements that decried the evils of climate change and expressed sympathy for Muslims affected by severe flooding in Pakistan, probably in an effort to bolster the group’s image among mainstream Muslims.

AQAP since September has released three issues of *Inspire*—the group’s English-language online magazine produced by its media wing—including a “Special Edition” in November that glorified the group’s disrupted 29 October cargo plot.

Our Evolving Response: Lessons from 12/25 and Beyond

In light of this dynamic terrorist landscape, the CT Community has significantly evolved to improve our chances of disrupting terrorist attacks before they occur and reducing the likelihood that attacks will be successful. These reforms address a wide variety of areas, including prioritizing CT reforms across the Intelligence Community, clarifying counterterrorism analytic responsibilities, improving our ability to develop tactical leads like the identity of a future Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab by creating NCTC's "Pursuit Group," expanding watchlisting resources and modifying watchlisting criteria, accelerating information integration across key interagency data holdings, and continuing to prioritize sharing of intelligence with state, local, and tribal partners.

With respect to our improved ability to develop tactical leads, one year ago I directed the creation of a new "Pursuit Group" within NCTC, which now focuses exclusively on information that could lead to the discovery of threats aimed against the Homeland or US interests abroad. The Pursuit Group's six analytical teams work with our IC partners to identify and examine as early as possible leads that could become terrorist threats; to pursue unresolved and non-obvious connections; and to inform in a timely manner appropriate US Government entities for action. Although I cannot discuss these findings in an unclassified setting, I can inform the Committee that the Pursuit Group has repeatedly identified key leads that would have otherwise been missed amidst a sea of uncorrelated data.

We are also continuing to implement revamped watchlisting protocols, and—in conjunction with the FBI and DHS—we have made major improvements to the Terrorist Identities Datamart Environment (*i.e.*, the classified backbone of terrorist watchlisting also known as "TIDE") to better support watchlisting, information sharing, and analysis. In addition, a comprehensive training program has been developed for the counterterrorism community involved in watchlisting and screening to ensure consistent application of watchlisting standards across the U.S. Government. Finally, I restructured NCTC's directorates to bring improved focus to terrorist identities; the new directorate brings additional resources to bear to enhance watchlisting records and fuse biometric and biographic watchlisting data.

Supporting all of these and other NCTC missions, NCTC has continued to lead information integration across the counterterrorism community. NCTC has long had appropriate access to a plethora of databases that span every aspect of terrorism information, but over the past year in conjunction with the ODNI, DHS, CIA, NSA, DOD, and DOJ (including FBI), we have further developed an Information Technology infrastructure to better meet the demands of the evolving threat. Such steps include the enhancement of a "Google-like" search across databases, and the development of a "CT Data Layer" to discover non-obvious terrorist relationships so that analysts can examine potential findings more efficiently. All of these efforts are being pursued vehemently, but they also require careful consideration of complex

legal, policy, and technical issues as well as the implementation of appropriate privacy, civil liberty, and security protections.

And as we improve our ability to counter the evolving threat, we remain focused on sharing intelligence outside the “federal family.” Working with and through DHS and FBI, NCTC’s Interagency Threat Assessment and Coordination Group (ITACG) continues to bridge the intelligence information gap between traditional intelligence agencies and state, local, tribal (SLT) partners, playing a pivotal role in assisting federal partners in interpreting and analyzing intelligence intended for dissemination to SLT mission partners.

Countering Violent Extremism

As this Committee knows well, counterterrorism efforts are not just about stopping plots but must also include addressing “upstream factors” that drive violent extremism. NCTC continues to play a significant role in this realm, both overseas and at home. Pursuant to our authorities under the *Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act*, NCTC helps identify, integrate, coordinate, and assess US Government efforts that aim to counter and prevent the recruitment and radicalization of a new generation of terrorists. Our focus is on both near and long-term efforts to undercut the terrorist narrative and promote safe and responsive communities, thereby minimizing the pool of people who would support violent extremism.

More specifically, NCTC works with colleagues in federal, state, local and tribal governments; with international partners; and with the private sector to integrate all elements of national power to counter and prevent violent extremism. We are coordinating an interagency planning effort to address domestic radicalization. Where appropriate, NCTC is also helping support and coordinate the federal government’s engagement with American communities where terrorists are focusing their recruiting efforts.

In all of our efforts we work closely with security agencies such as DHS and FBI, as well as non-traditional federal partners such as the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Education. For example, NCTC participated in an event with the Department of Education where five school districts came together to discuss unique challenges facing schoolchildren of Somali descent, including targeted recruitment efforts by al-Shabaab. These non-security partners offer expertise in social services and the capacity to act on the local and community level. By coordinating and integrating a broad community of interest, NCTC ensures a “whole of government” approach that is vital to addressing and preventing radicalization.

While government has an important role in developing and implementing strategies, we view the private sector and community institutions as key players in directly countering radicalization, and we believe strongly that addressing radicalization requires community-based solutions that are sensitive to local dynamics and needs. In this regard, NCTC has engaged the private sector to provide forums in which to examine these issues. Specifically, we recently

participated in an event hosted by a prominent think tank that brought together private technology experts and community members in order to explore ways to counter terrorist narratives on the Internet.

NCTC in coordination with FBI and DHS has also worked with community leaders, state and local governments and law enforcement involved in countering violent extremism to understand how governments can effectively partner with their communities. It has become clear that government can play a significant role by acting as a convener and facilitator that informs and supports—but does not direct—community-led initiatives. Based on this, NCTC has developed a Community Awareness Briefing that conveys unclassified information about the realities of terrorist recruitment in the Homeland and on the Internet. The briefing aims to educate and empower parents and community leaders to combat violent extremist narratives and recruitment. NCTC has presented the briefing to communities—including Muslim American communities—around the country, leveraging, when possible, existing US Government engagement platforms such as DHS and FBI roundtables.

Conclusion

Chairman King and Ranking Member Thompson, I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify before your committee today. Together we have made great strides in reducing the likelihood of a successful terrorist attack—especially a catastrophic one. But as you know well, perfection is no more possible in counterterrorism than it is in any other endeavor. NCTC and the entire counterterrorism community work tirelessly to reduce the likelihood of attack but we cannot guarantee safety. In this regard, I believe we must continue to foster resilience domestically while highlighting the futility of al Qa'ida's fight.

Without your leadership, the strides we have jointly made to counter the terrorist threat would not be possible. Congress's continued support is critical to the Center's mission to lead our Nation's effort to combat terrorism at home and abroad by analyzing the threat, sharing that information with our partners, and integrating all instruments of national power to ensure their coordinated application and thereby maximize our effectiveness at combating the threat. I look forward to continuing our work together in the years to come.