

House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence
Opening Statement
October 6, 2011
Domestic Threat Intelligence Hearing

Chairman Mike Rogers

Statement Submitted For the Record

The Committee will come to order.

Today the Committee welcomes FBI Director Robert Mueller and National Counterterrorism Center Director Matt Olsen to discuss the state of the terrorism threat against the United States and how the Intelligence Community has changed in the decade since 9/11 to address this threat. In the wake of the takedown of al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula leader Anwar al-Aulaqi, who former NCTC Director Mike Leiter called the single greatest terrorism threat to the homeland, we convene to discuss the future of the al-Qa'ida threat against the United States.

But first, I would like to congratulate you, Director Olsen, on your recent confirmation as NCTC Director and although we've spoken privately, I'd also like to take the opportunity to congratulate you publicly, Director Mueller, on your two-year term extension. I look forward to continuing this committee's productive relationships with both of your organizations.

This is an unusual week for the House Intelligence Committee, as this is the second of two open hearings by this committee. While we normally conduct committee business behind closed doors in order to protect classified information, I feel that it is important to hold hearings that are open to the public when possible so that the American people are exposed to the issues that affect their national security. Perhaps no topic more directly addresses the security of the country than that of this hearing.

Today's hearing continues our public series marking the 10th anniversary of the September 11, 2001 attacks with a focus on the terrorism threat to the homeland, the FBI's efforts to investigate and disrupt these threats, and NCTC's work in pulling together and making sense of disparate pieces of terrorism information to support those FBI investigations, among other things. A crucial element of this discussion is the change that has occurred in the Intelligence Community since 9/11 to better enable the United States to protect itself from terrorism—namely the creation of NCTC within the Office of the Director of National Intelligence and the creation of the intelligence-focused National Security Branch in the FBI.

Al-Qa'ida has effectively decentralized its operations since 9/11 to various affiliates throughout the world. Many of these affiliates, in turn, have advocated individual acts of terrorism against the United States, particularly by those already in the country. This evolution has made the detection and prevention of terrorist attacks exponentially more challenging.

Gone are the days of plots involving dozens of foreign terrorists, planned by al-Qa'ida central leadership over the course of several years. What has taken their place are plots like that of Rezwan Ferdaus, who was arrested by the FBI in Boston last week for planning to attack the Pentagon and U.S.

Capitol Building using remote controlled aircraft filled with explosives. Ferdaus acted alone. He was self radicalized. He is a U.S. citizen with a physics degree from Northeastern University. This is a far cry from the 19 hijackers who boarded planes the morning of September 11, 2001. This contrast highlights the need for the Intelligence Community to stay ahead of the evolving terrorist threat to the homeland.

While the Bureau has undoubtedly made tremendous strides since 2001 in improving its intelligence capabilities, the report released earlier this year by the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee on the Fort Hood attack makes clear that the FBI still has work to do to complete its transformation into an intelligence-driven organization. It is worth noting that the FBI has the challenging task of balancing prosecutorial equities with intelligence considerations, but when there is friction between these two objectives, intelligence must always win out. Preventing a future attack is more important than securing a prison sentence.

I would like to hear how the FBI plans to complete its intelligence transformation and what, from your perspective Director Mueller, the end-state of this transformation looks like. Specifically, how does the Bureau plan to more fully incorporate analysts into the operations of field offices? We have seen inconsistent results as the Members and staff of this Committee have visited field offices throughout the country. Also, has the FBI clarified the division of labor and hierarchy of command-and-control authorities among its headquarters units, field offices, and Joint Terrorism Task Forces? This is another issue that, at times, has hindered terrorism investigations.

Improved interaction between the Intelligence Community and state and local authorities has been key to improving the information flow critical to detecting and preventing terrorist attacks. The FBI, with its 56 field offices and 104 JTTFs throughout the country, plays a lead role in this effort. With the evolution and expansion of the Intelligence Community post-9/11, other organizations within the community also interact with state and local authorities, namely NCTC and the Department of Homeland Security. It is important that all organizations who take part in this particular mission understand their roles in order to avoid creating redundancy and confusion. I would like to hear your views on each of your organizations' roles in this regard.

NCTC has come a long way since its founding in 2004 in its mission to integrate and analyze terrorism information. With staff from 16 organizations and access to counterterrorism databases throughout the community, NCTC truly is an integrated center that has the ability to tap resources and expertise from across the Intelligence Community. Most importantly, it has the buy-in from the rest of the community.

That said, we all know that there have been instances in recent years when we've avoided attack because of luck—or more accurately terrorist incompetence—rather than our ability to detect and prevent a plot. The so-called Christmas Day bomber Umar Farouk Abdulmuttallab, whose jury selection began earlier this week, and Times Square bomber Faisal Shahzad are two examples that come to mind. In each of these cases, the Intelligence Community had information that was not tied together to allow it to detect these plots before they were executed.

This points to the need for NCTC to continue to improve its operations so that future plots do not slip through our fingers. I know that in the wake of the Christmas Day attempt NCTC did make some changes in the form of Pursuit Teams, with the sole purpose of developing tactical leads and pursuing

terrorism threats, and enhancements to the watchlisting process. I would like to hear from you, Director Olsen, how well these initiatives are working and what other initiatives you plan to implement to address the ever-evolving terrorist threat to the homeland.

I thank you both again for being here, and I'd now like to invite Mr. Ruppertsburger to make an opening statement.