



Significant Developments in Terror Threats Since 9/11, Officials Say

Napolitano, Mueller, Leiter Discuss Increased Tempo of Attacks Against U.S.

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The nation's top counterterrorism officials were blunt. The threat from within---of Americans willing to commit [terrorist acts](#)--- is growing. FBI Director Robert S. Mueller III told a congressional hearing today that a spike in recent terrorism cases is direct evidence of the evolving threat.

"Groups affiliated with [al Qaeda](#) are now actively targeting the United States and looking to use Americans or Westerners who are able to remain undetected by heightened security measures," Mueller said. "It appears domestic extremism and radicalization appears to have become more pronounced based on the number of disruptions and incidents."

Mueller appeared before the Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs committee along with Department of Homeland Security [Secretary Janet Napolitano](#) and National Counterterrorism Chief [Michael Leiter](#).

"Homegrown terrorists represent a new and changing facet of the terrorist threat." Napolitano said, "To be clear, by homegrown, I mean terrorist operatives who are U.S. persons, and who were radicalized in the United States."

The officials all pointed to a series of recent incidents that show that al Qaeda, its affiliates and associates were more active than ever.

"During the past year our nation has dealt with the most significant developments in the terrorist threat to the Homeland since 9/11," Leiter told the committee. "The attack threats are now more complex, and the diverse array of threats tests our ability to respond, and makes it difficult to predict where the next attack may come.

The attacks cited included:

- The disruption of a plot to bomb the New York City subway by Najibullah Zazi, a naturalized U.S. citizen, last September.

- The attack at Ft Hood Texas by gunman Army Maj. Nidal Hassan which resulted in 13 people killed and over 30 wounded.
- The attempted Christmas Day bombing of Northwest Airlines flight 253 by alleged al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula operative Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab.
- The averted May 1 bombing in Times Square by Faisal Shahzad.

Officials: Internet Is Powerful Recruiting Tool

Hassan, Abdulmutallab and Shahzad are all believed to have links or have been influenced by radical Muslim cleric Anwar Awlaki, a Yemeni-American who has moved from a propagandist for al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula to an operational role, active in attack planning. Those three were far from alone. In the past two years over 60 Americans have been arrested or convicted on terrorism charges.

Shortly after the Zazi case was disrupted, the FBI conducted a series of sting operations that showed the increase in the number of individuals in the U.S. willing to take action on behalf of terrorist groups.

In Dallas, Hosam Maher Husain Smadi, an illegal immigrant from Jordan, placed what he thought was a powerful car bomb in the parking garage of a Dallas office building.

The FBI also conducted a sting and arrested Michael Finton, who authorities say converted to Islam in prison. Finton allegedly drove a van he believed was carrying a ton of explosives and parked it in front of the federal courthouse in Springfield, Ill.

Sen. Joseph Lieberman (I-CT), the chairman of the committee said, "These attacks and others show the full range of threats we now face from lone wolves."

Leiter, the head of the National Counterterrorism Center, said that the vast array of terrorist propaganda on the Internet was having an influence in driving individuals in the United States to turn to potential acts of terrorism.

Describing the power of the Internet and its use as a recruiting tool, Leiter said, "A blend of al Qaeda inspiration, perceived victimization, and glorification of past plotting, has become increasingly accessible through the Internet, and English-language websites are tailored to address the unique concerns of US-based extremists."

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