

**Don Borelli**  
**Chief Operating Officer, The Soufan Group**  
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By way of background, I'm a 25-year veteran of the FBI. My last position was Assistant Special Agent in Charge of the Joint Terrorism Taskforce in New York. The New York FBI office has extraterritorial responsibility for Africa; consequently, I was responsible for FBI international terrorism matters involving Africa. In that position, I led a team of more than 60 FBI Agents to Kampala, Uganda in July 2010 to assist the Uganda Police Force in their investigation of the simultaneous suicide bombing attacks during the final game of the 2010 World Cup Soccer game – which was conducted by al Shabaab. So I have firsthand experience in dealing with the atrocities committed by this terrorist group.

Since leaving the FBI, as COO of The Soufan Group, I have helped oversee our Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) research, including our recent year-long global study into Countering the Narratives of Extremism, which we launched on September 9<sup>th</sup> of this year. I led our team to Minnesota, Kenya and Uganda, focusing our research on Al Shabaab. And I personally interviewed policy makers, community leaders, security officials, and young people in the crosshairs of al Shabaab recruiters. And this is what I would like to focus on today: al Shabaab's recruitment efforts, particularly those focusing on Western youth.

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While the September 21st attack on the Westgate Mall in Nairobi, put al-Shabaab back into the international spotlight, it never left the lenses of security practitioners and CVE experts. Somalis here in the U.S.—not all of them being American citizens—account for nearly a quarter of the terrorism indictments in the United States since 2009. About two-thirds of these indictments were for traveling or attempting to travel abroad to fight in Somalia or to send others to fight, while the other third involve financing to al Shabaab. (*Source –The Fordham Ledger: Facts and Figures in National Security*)

It's important to note that al Shabaab's political agenda is divided into different factions: the nationalistic agenda, which aims to fight against foreign troops in Somalia, regain lost territory within Somalia, and to install a sharia-based government in Somalia; and the global jihad agenda, aligned with al Qaeda and focusing its efforts against the West and its allies. This division of ideals is also reflected in al Shabaab's recruiting efforts.

The narrative of the nationalist agenda uses reports of violence in their ancestral home, along with a compelling combination of propaganda, and accurate reporting, that appeal to a sense of obligation to defend Somalia from "foreign invaders." The

global agenda, is in line with the broader al Qaeda message of a global Islamic caliphate.

After speaking with many members of the Somali-American community in Minnesota, we found that the narrative that resonates loudest with Somali youth is overwhelmingly political as opposed to religious. It focuses on the nationalist agenda, and is driven by a deep nationalist concern for the future of Somalia.

However, just because a young person might be enticed to join al Shabaab to defend his Somali homeland, this doesn't mean he isn't a threat to the U.S. Our fear is that while Somalis here in the U.S. may travel to Somalia with a nationalist agenda, and intend to stay and fight there, they could be converted into following the global agenda—the al Qaeda agenda—and return to the U.S. to launch attacks here.

We have seen this pattern with other communities. The thwarted attack against the New York subway system in 2009 illustrates this threat. Najibullah Zazi, an Afghan who traveled back to his homeland with the idea of fighting there, was coopted by al Qaeda and convinced he could do more good by taking the fight back to the U.S. And as we all know, stopping attacks from U.S. citizens and green card holders is a much, much, greater challenge than stopping attacks from foreigners. The Boston Marathon tragedy is a stark reminder of this threat.

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What, therefore, can we be doing to mitigate the threat and counter al Shabaab's recruiting tactics both here in the U.S. and abroad?

Our strategy needs to be multifaceted. We need to continue to put pressure on al Shabaab through militarily, law enforcement, intelligence and economic resources, and we need to continue our support for the African Union and other forces attempting to rebuild Somalia.

We need to expand our efforts in promoting education and critical thinking among would-be recruits for groups. As we have seen in Minnesota, many who join al Shabaab do so to help their Somali homeland. They need to understand that al Shabaab is not helping their homeland; rather, it is committing atrocities against its own people. Potentially vulnerable recruits need to see how al Shabaab and its allies in Al Qaeda are manipulating them. They need to understand that al Shabaab will turn their intentions to help Somalia into a global terrorist agenda that aims to export violence and kill innocent people in so doing.

So how do we do this?

We need to understand that extremists use local grievances as initial motivators to recruit, so the counter-narrative must take place at the local level, and we need to be very strategic in the medium, the message, and the messenger we use. For example, where people are being recruited because of alleged (or even true) local or tribal grievances, it is community leaders and groups that need to be on the forefront of the response. Our focus should be on helping credible voices in the community counter the message of violent jihad offered by al Shabaab, al Qaeda, and the like.

And as we know, the Internet has created new challenges in combatting the violent extremist message. As recently as last week we saw al Shabaab bragging about the Westgate attack on Twitter. We need to be just as effective in using the Internet, if not more so.

Lastly, we must not make the same mistake with al Shabaab that we did with al Qaeda—that is, viewing it as only a local or regional threat. In the early 1990s many smart people ignored al Qaeda because it was seen as a group only focused on the Middle East and Central Asia. We have seen how a terrorist organization gone unchecked can morph into a global threat. We must not let that happen with al Shabaab.

I look forward to expanding on these points, and others, during our question and answer session.

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