

**Statement of
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Members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to appear before you today. It is extremely unfortunate and saddening that our gathering and important conversations were precipitated by the tragic events in Boston, but this hearing, and those to follow, offer valuable opportunities to discuss the methods and strategies that can best address and disrupt the ever-present threat of terrorism and violent extremism. My deepest condolences, thoughts and prayers go to the victims of this cowardly act.

The Boston Marathon bombing was conducted by terrorists who grew up within miles of where they committed their tragedy. They were locals, educated, living and working in the area. Because of this, they knew the target environment and did not require training to familiarize themselves with the area and its protective measures. Put simply, Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev were homegrown violent extremists, and because of them, Boston joined a fraternity of cities around the world that have endured terrorist attacks plotted and conducted by their own residents. Much like the Madrid train bombings in March 2004, as well as the July 2005 bombings in London, the terrorists' familiarity with the target area afforded them critical situational awareness that facilitated their ability to plan and execute local attacks, as well as the capacity to remain largely unidentified by our counterterrorism efforts until after the attack.

Superseding the issue of how the Tsarnaev brothers were able to succeed is a matter how they arrived at the decision to attack in the first place. The Tsarnaevs came to the United States long before embracing the ideology that, in their minds, legitimized their violent activity. As a starting point for any analysis on this tragic incident, it is essential that law enforcement, counterterrorism agencies, the members of this committee, and the country overall understand that the Tsarnaev brothers became terrorists in this country and were thus homegrown, even as the extremist ideology to which they ascribed was likely influenced by ideas created and embraced elsewhere in the world. The Boston attacks were not a case of foreign-borne terrorism, but rather, of homegrown violent extremism (HVE).

The Complex Radicalization Process

In the context of the United States, HVE describes terrorist activity or plots targeting the United States and U.S. assets by American citizens or residents who have embraced their extremist ideology largely within this country. A precursor to HVE is a process of radicalization, though like the term "terrorism," the concept of radicalization is widely referenced but remains poorly defined. The term is routinely used as a synonym for extremist activities conducted by Muslim Identity adherents. This is shortsighted, as radicalization is not limited to any one racial, religious or issue-oriented group. Radicalization is a process whereby individuals identify, embrace and engage in furthering extremist ideologies. This final element – engagement – is one part of the indoctrination pathway continuum, which has the potential to yield violent extremist activities.

To be sure, many people who hold extremist views do not engage in violent activity. The Constitution protects speech, even hate speech, which is inherently extremist. In that regard, we should be mindful of the totality of circumstances that create the capacity for violent incidents and avoid a narrow focus on the presence of extremist ideologies in general. Little attention has been given in the scholarly or policy literature to defining criteria for which extremist ideologies pose a threat to national or global security, or whether extremist ideologies matter in the absence of violent actions. A 2009 U.S. Presidential Task Force on Confronting the Ideology of Radical

Extremism suggests the administration should *expand* its focus from violent to nonviolent extremism.¹ This is an important distinction deserving further analysis, and perhaps an even more important issue is how an individual identifies and embraces extremism to begin with.

Indiscriminant violent action can be the result of radicalization, but the process often begins with a “cognitive opening” that is unique to the individual. This opening may be a traumatic event that makes someone more susceptible to accepting extremist ideology. It is as if a “grievance switch” is flipped on, grievances that can stem from myriad experiences and perceptions, such as conflicted identities, injustice, oppression, or socio-economic exclusion. Personal grievances may be economic (such as losing a job or stunted mobility), social or cultural (such as racism or humiliation), or political (such as discrimination). Some grievances incorporate a sense of victimization by crime, including a perceived crime committed by the United States government, as was the case with Timothy McVeigh and his view of the government standoff events of Whidbey Island (1984), Ruby Ridge (1992) and Waco (1993).

While understanding and addressing these grievances is one potential avenue for predicting and preventing violent extremism, the radicalization pathway is not a fixed trajectory, with specific, identifiable indicators that can be acknowledged on an itemized checklist of suspicious activities. Caution should be exercised against viewing radicalization as a conveyor belt that starts with grievances and ends with violence, with easily discernible signposts along the way.² Rather, a more effective approach is to identify the circumstances under which an individual can progress to violence through the radicalization process yet beneath the homeland security radar.

An examination of radicalization yields broad questions regarding how a person becomes engaged, stays engaged or may actually disengage from a group or extremist ideology. Terrorism requires a combination of three things – an alienated individual, a legitimizing ideology (engaged through radicalization), and an enabling environment. Of the three, it is the environment that is most susceptible to positive influences that, supported by appropriate policies and behaviors, can reduce the risk of HVE.

Our security policies and technologies are an essential component in the never-ending counterterrorism effort. Yet, as we encounter the threat from homegrown violent extremism, such as the kind seen in Boston, our national efforts should also address the role communities play in facilitating and more importantly, hindering radicalization.

Risk-Based Security and Positive Community Engagement

As law enforcement and counterterrorism officials analyze the Boston Marathon attacks, we should resist the urge to “fix” something, absent specific evidence of some failure or compromise of the system. Boston’s is one of the most famous marathons in the world, which from a national security and law enforcement perspective, brings with it a range of protective measures afforded to a Department of Homeland Security (DHS) National Special Security Event (NSSE).

¹ Task Force on Confronting the Ideology of Radical Extremism (March 2009). *Rewriting the Narrative: An Integrated Strategy for Counterradicalization*. Washington, D.C.: Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

² Patel, Faiza (2011). *Rethinking Radicalization*. Brennan Center for Justice at New York University School of Law.

Security is comprised of policies, processes and technology. As it relates to environments like sporting events or critical infrastructure, the emphasis should be on policies that are risk-based – that is, focused on threats that present the most danger and are most likely to occur. We have the applied research capacity to and do model potential attack paths, given the desirability or utility yielded to an adversary. Interdisciplinary methodologies, such as our successful application of game theory and randomization, will continue to hold significant importance in holistic countermeasure strategies.

At the same time, recognizing that the goal is to contain terrorism and not simply stop terrorists, we should seek out opportunities to empower communities to take part in disrupting the radicalization process that could ultimately lead to violent action. Community inaction, either through tacit approval of extremist ideas or a hesitancy to speak up when encountering an individual exploring a legitimizing ideology, provides an enabling environment. Inasmuch as we strive to intercept individuals in their transition from ideological extremist to violent adversary, we should also work with communities where such threats may arise to disrupt the radicalization process altogether, both by addressing grievances, and by recognizing and encouraging stakeholder engagement.

One challenge in this case is the role online media can play in fostering violent extremism. Arguably, the Internet's capacity for propelling extremists through the radicalization process is the single most important and dangerous innovation since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The Internet is in some ways a virtual community, and future attacks against the United States and its interests will likely involve adversaries who have traversed the radicalization process, at least in part, via the Internet. Inasmuch as real-world communities can take part in preventing or facilitating violent extremism, the same is true for the digital environment.

Securing a democratic society is a formidable challenge, and we will never be completely free of the terrorist threat. In the aftermath of tragedies like Boston, the public is generally amenable to sacrificing certain liberties in the name of security. However, we must live by our principles, which in the United States are upheld by the rule of law. To alter our government's use and amendment of law with a reactive policy response to a terrorist threat is to concede victory to the adversary. What is more, singling out a person or entire community as suspect based on anything other than fact undermines the community cohesion we need to counter the persistent threat.

Collective vigilance and awareness of how grievances can make individuals susceptible to extremist ideas are fundamental tools that, when employed by counterterrorism officials as well as the public, provide essential supplements to the broader mission of preventing tragedies of the kind seen in Boston. Protecting the country is an ongoing effort that must remain versatile in the face of creative and adaptive adversaries. Every step towards greater security is matched with a would-be terrorist's exploitation of an unaddressed vulnerability. There is no finish line in homeland security.