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# Department of Justice

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**STATEMENT OF**

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ASSISTANT DIRECTOR  
FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION**

**BEFORE THE**

**COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY  
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**ENTITLED**

**“COUNTERING VIOLENT ISLAMIST EXTREMISM:  
THE URGENT THREAT OF FOREIGN FIGHTERS AND HOMEGROWN TERROR”**

**PRESENTED**

**FEBRUARY 11, 2015**

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**Statement of Michael Steinbach  
Assistant Director  
Federal Bureau of Investigation**

**Before the  
Committee on Homeland Security  
United States House of Representatives**

**At a Hearing Entitled  
“Countering Violent Islamist Extremism:  
The Urgent Threat of Foreign Fighters and Homegrown Terror”**

**Presented  
February 11, 2015**

Good morning Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Thompson, and Members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the dynamic threat of foreign fighters traveling in support of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and the rising threat to the United States from homegrown violent extremism. This threat remains one of the biggest priorities not only for the FBI but for the Intelligence Community (IC) as a whole and our foreign partners.

Conflicts in Syria and Iraq are currently the most attractive overseas theater for western-based extremists who want to engage in violence. We estimate upwards of 150 Americans have traveled or attempted to travel to Syria to join extremist groups. However, once in Syria, it is very difficult to discern what happens there. This lack of clarity remains troubling to the IC.

ISIL has proven to be relentless and continues to terrorize individuals in Syria and Iraq, including Westerners. We are concerned about the possibility of homegrown extremists becoming radicalized by information available on the internet. ISIL utilizes high-quality, traditional media platforms, as well as widespread social media campaigns, to propagate its extremist ideas. The group's ability to produce visually appealing messaging coupled with the rampant use of social media by ISIL supporters exhibits the diverse propaganda capabilities. Combined, these tactics result in sophisticated propaganda which may continue to inspire individuals in the homeland to travel to fight overseas. Recent propaganda releases include multiple issues of English language publications, including a complete English magazine. Several videos of ISIL-held hostages and videos sensationalizing ISIL members have also been released.

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The threat to American interests overseas is most acute in Iraq, but extends throughout the Middle East region and to the West. There is little doubt that ISIL views the United States and the West as a strategic enemy. A year ago, the leader of ISIL warned the United States will soon be in direct conflict with the group. In January 2015, ISIL released a video via social media networking sites reiterating the group's encouragement of lone offender attacks in Western countries; specifically advocating for attacks against soldiers, patrons, law enforcement and intelligence members. Several incidents have occurred in the United States and Europe over the last few months that indicate this "call to arms" has resonated among ISIL supporters and sympathizers.

Our Western partners in Australia, Canada, France, and the United Kingdom (UK) have recently disrupted plotting and, unfortunately, had security officers attacked by individuals linked to ISIL or other forms of violent extremism. A French national who took hostages in Paris and shot and killed a policewoman in early January, claimed he was an ISIL supporter. In December 2014, another French national entered a police station in France and began stabbing police officers before being killed by police in a violent extremism attack. Two separate attacks in Canada in October 2014 targeted Canadian soldiers. Additionally, in September and October, the UK and Australian authorities separately thwarted attacks targeting local law enforcement. In each scenario, the apprehended individuals had suspected ties to ISIL.

The FBI remains concerned the recent calls by ISIL and its supporters on violent extremist web forums, and the recent events in Europe could continue to motivate homegrown extremists to conduct attacks in the homeland. Online supporters of ISIL have used various social media platforms to call for retaliation against the U.S. in the homeland. In one case, an Ohio-based man was arrested in January after he obtained a weapon and stated his intent to conduct an attack on the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C. Using a Twitter account, the individual posted statements, videos, and other content indicating support for ISIL, and he planned his attack based on this voiced support.

Al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) continues to pose one of the greatest threats to the United States. AQAP's online English magazine *Inspire* advocates for lone wolves to conduct attacks against the homeland and Western targets by utilizing simple and inexpensive tactics and methods. The most recent edition of *Inspire* was released via social media sites in December 2014. As with the previous editions, the magazine promotes the need for lone wolves to carry out small arms attacks and provides specific, detailed "how to" instructions for constructing a successful bomb.

Historically, AQAP has been focused on large scale transportation and aviation plotting. However, last month's shooting at a satirical magazine's office in Paris demonstrates the sophisticated ability of individuals inspired or directed by AQAP to conduct coordinated attacks by combining small arms and explosive devices. The attackers demonstrated extensive preparation and maintained a level of discipline throughout the attack. This assault shows a new wave of extremism; a blending of homegrown violent extremism and an association with a foreign terrorist organization.

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Soon after the attacks in Paris, authorities in Belgium conducted a raid against several individuals who were allegedly planning an attack against police personnel. These individuals purportedly had ties to ISIL and allegedly had some connections to the Paris attackers. Our European partners remain on heightened alert and continue to take the steps necessary to mitigate imminent threats.

The recent events in Europe re-emphasize our need to remain vigilant in the homeland as these small scale attacks are feasible within the United States. Individuals inspired by foreign terrorist groups could be covertly arming themselves with expertise and tools to carry out an attack in the homeland. Community and world events may trigger one of these individuals to act. We remain concerned these types of events, which were widely broadcasted in the media, could inspire “copy cat” attacks. Additionally, as we saw after ISIL posted videos depicting beheadings of hostages, we continue to see intelligence advocating plots which include public or videotaped beheadings.

The FBI, in partnership with the Department of Homeland Security, is utilizing all investigative techniques and methods to combat the threat these individuals may pose to the United States. In conjunction with our domestic and foreign partners, we are rigorously collecting and analyzing intelligence information as it pertains to the ongoing threat posed by ISIL, AQAP, and other foreign terrorist organizations. In each of the FBI’s 56 Field Offices, the Joint Terrorism Task Forces remain vigilant to ensure the safety of the American public. Given the global impact of the Syria and Iraq conflicts, regular engagement with our domestic and foreign partners concerning foreign fighters is critical.

The FBI continues to pursue increased information sharing, efforts to combat radicalization, and exchanges regarding community outreach programs and policing strategies.

Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Thompson, and Committee Members, I thank you for this opportunity to testify concerning the threat foreign fighters and homegrown extremists pose to the homeland. I am happy to answer any questions you might have.