

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

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### Opening Statement

#### Ranking Member Stephen F. Lynch (MA-08)

#### Subcommittee on National Security

#### Hearing on “*Radicalization in the U.S. and the Rise of Terrorism*”

#### September 14, 2016

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to thank you, Chairman Meadows, and Ranking Member Connolly for holding this hearing to examine the threat of radicalization and Homegrown Violent Extremism. I'd also like to thank today's witnesses for helping this Committee with its work.

As reported by Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve last month, the U.S.-led coalition to combat ISIS has killed at least 45,000 ISIS fighters since September of 2014 and liberated more than 25,000 square kilometers in Iraq and Syria. This amounts to more than half of what ISIS previously controlled in Iraq and roughly 20% of formerly-held territory in Syria. According to Defense Secretary Ashton Carter, the terrorist organization is also on the verge of losing its regional stronghold in Libya as its fighters retreat from their tactical center in the city of Sirte.

It is clear that battlefield losses have degraded ISIS' ability to maintain offensive operations on the ground in Iraq, Syria, and Libya and recruit U.S. and other foreign fighters to the region. However, they have also led the group to shift its militant strategy towards directing and inspiring terrorist attacks in the West. F.B.I. Director James Comey recently predicted that while the global coalition will eventually crush ISIS, *“through the fingers of that crush are going to come hundreds of really dangerous people”* intent on bringing the fight to Western Europe and the United States. He has also noted that the F.B.I. is tracking nearly 800 ISIS-related cases across the country – that's about 80% of all F.B.I. cases nationwide.

This strategic shift has already manifested itself in an escalation of ISIS-directed or inspired attacks in Western countries and worldwide. These include the coordinated suicide bombings and shootings in Paris, Brussels, Istanbul, and Ankara as well as the cargo truck attack in Nice, the café attack in Dhaka, and in the United States, the terrorist attacks in San Bernardino and Orlando.

The June 2016 attack in Orlando is also the most recent example of the rising threat of Homegrown Violent Extremism in the U.S. that has accompanied ISIS' continued calls for lone wolf terrorist attacks in the West. As reflected in the 9-1-1 transcript released by the F.B.I., the Orlando shooter, Omar Mateen, repeatedly pledged his allegiance to ISIS while he perpetrated the attack. One day later, ISIS issued a statement deeming Mr. Mateen *“one of the soldiers of the caliphate.”*

Given the grave threat posed by Homegrown Violent Extremism, national security demands that we work in a bipartisan manner to adopt practical reforms based on the lessons learned from Orlando, San Bernardino, and other attacks. Since 9/11, the F.B.I. has primarily focused its counter-terrorism efforts on disrupting terrorist networks. However, the facts surrounding Orlando indicate that we must also ensure that federal law enforcement and homeland security agencies are adapting to the prevalence of lone wolf attackers who are

inspired to act by a foreign terrorist organization. I would note that the F.B.I. previously investigated Mr. Mateen on radicalization grounds on two separate occasions and even placed him on a terrorist watch list. He did not remain on the agency's radar given the absence of any "*ties of consequence*."

Common sense also dictates that we address the accessibility of firearms to individuals who are known or suspected terrorists. While federal law specifies several grounds that disqualify a potential buyer from firearms eligibility, being on a terrorist watch list is not currently one of them.

Moreover, we must continue to develop a long-term and comprehensive strategy to counter the pervasiveness of extremist messages abroad and at home. As recommended by Ms. Farah Pandith, appointed by Secretary Clinton in 2009 to serve as the first State Department Special Representative to Muslim Communities, future actions designed to combat radicalization and Homegrown Violent Extremism should include diplomatic and economic consequences for foreign nations that support the exportation of extremist ideologies. They must also include coordinated and proactive efforts to push back against extremist propaganda online.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I look forward to examining issues related to Homegrown Violent Extremism and other forms of radicalization with our witnesses and I yield back the balance of my time.

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