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26 Foiled Terror Plots Show Success of Information Sharing

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Last week, the FBI, along with its state and local counterparts, announced arrests in three terror plots targeting several American cities. These foiled plots now make 26 publicly known terror plots that have been disrupted by law enforcement since September 11, 2001.

These foiled plots demonstrate just how far information sharing has come since 9/11. But the plots also demonstrate that the threat of terrorism has not diminished. Congress and the Obama Administration should recognize these threats as a reminder that they must work together to facilitate information sharing from the bottom to the top—integrating local, state, and federal entities as well as the private sector into a well-functioning and seamless homeland security enterprise.

Three Plots Disrupted. During the week of September 21, the FBI along with respective state and local law enforcement announced the disruption of three terror plots, including the arrests of the three following men:

1. *Najibullah Zazi.* Zazi, a 24-year-old Afghani, was arrested after purchasing large quantities of chemicals used to make a TATP bomb, the same type of weapon used in the 2005 bombing of the London Underground and the 2001 “shoe bomb” plot. Zazi had traveled to Pakistan, where he received instruction in bomb making and attended an al-Qaeda training camp. Zazi allegedly planned to detonate TATP bombs on the New York City subway.

2. *Hosam Maher Husein Smadi.* Smadi, a 19-year-old Jordanian, was apprehended last week in an attempt to plant a bomb in a Dallas skyscraper. He was arrested and charged after agents posing as terror cell members gave Smadi a fake bomb, which he later attempted to detonate.
3. *Michael Finton.* Finton, an American citizen, was arrested on September 23 by undercover FBI agents after attempting to detonate a car bomb filled with what he believed to be close to one ton of explosives outside of the Paul Findley Federal Building and Courthouse in downtown Springfield, Illinois. Evidence presented against Finton has shown that he expressed a desire to become a jihadist fighter and was aware that his planned attack would cause civilian injuries. He has been arrested on charges of attempted murder of federal employees and attempted use of a weapon of mass destruction.

The Right Tools. These three plots should remind Congress and the White House of just how far law enforcement has come since 2001. After the attacks of 9/11, it was clear that changes were needed to give law enforcement authorities more flexibility to conduct investigations and share infor-

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mation. Walls that separated the U.S. government from its allies, the FBI from state and local law enforcement, and law enforcement from the private sector and private citizens needed to be dissolved in order to effectively fight terrorism.

The U.S. addressed these needs by creating the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and developing terror-fighting legal and investigatory tools like the PATRIOT Act and an expanded Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) to help identify, prosecute, and convict terrorists.

The government is also looking to its allies to increase collective security around the globe through assistance programs and information-sharing agreements like the Visa Waiver Program (VWP). And the DHS, born in the aftermath of 9/11, continues to emphasize the need for law enforcement partnerships from the grassroots level on up. These relationships, like the Joint Terrorism Task Forces (JTTF), have helped disrupt the flow of money and resources. In fact, the New York City bombed plot foiled this week was a result of an investigation coordinated by a JTTF.

A Long War. While Congress and the Bush Administration may have started increasing America's counterterrorism abilities, maintaining the ability to stop terrorism requires diligence, cultivation, and maintenance by Congress and the White House.

President Barack Obama pledged that his Administration would continue to increase U.S. capacity and international partnerships to track down, capture, and kill terrorists around the world. Congress and the Obama Administration can work together to fulfill this promise by:

- **Preserving the PATRIOT Act.** Reauthorization of key provisions of the PATRIOT Act and FISA will require congressional support. FISA authorizes electronic surveillance within certain legal limits, while the PATRIOT Act facilitates cooperation among federal, state, and local agencies in information sharing and terrorism investigations. It also establishes mechanisms for conducting surveillance with modern technologies. But key provisions of the PATRIOT Act expire this year, and Congress will need to demonstrate its support by providing prompt reauthorization.

- **Expanding the VWP.** VWP allows pre-approved travelers from member countries to visit the U.S. for 90 days without a visa. Since the program underwent extensive security upgrades in 2007, it has become a valuable security device and a useful tool for public diplomacy and economic expansion. By continuing to add VWP countries, the U.S. can develop even more valuable information-sharing frameworks with countries around the globe. ESTA, the program's online portal, ensures that the U.S. knows more about foreign travelers before they even reach U.S. soil, allowing the U.S. to focus on keeping terrorists and other dangerous people out of the country. The White House should work with Congress to bring in new countries that meet VWP requirements and have a desire to work with the U.S. on security matters.
- **Encouraging more information sharing.** While information-fusion centers have helped increase the flow of information between federal, state, and local law enforcement, more needs to be done to continue and expand the free flow of information at all levels of government. Cooperation with foreign law enforcement agencies is also essential. DHS should place this information sharing at the top of its policy agenda.
- **Repealing 100 percent scanning and screening mandates.** Congress should reassess unworkable mandates, such as the 100 percent scanning and screening requirements, that monopolize DHS time and resources for little to no security gain. In 2007, Congress enacted these mandates to require 100 percent of maritime and air cargo to undergo scanning and screening, respectively. But enforcing these mandates is simply not feasible: It would require technology that is not available and would slow down the supply chain, disrupting an already struggling global economy. Instead, Congress should repeal these mandates and promote measures such as the Proliferation Security Initiative, a voluntary multilateral effort of 90 nations to interdict suspicious shipments as a better means of protecting cargo.

A Wake-Up Call. These three foiled plots occurred in the same week that the House and Sen-

ate Judiciary Committees sat down to review reauthorization of the sunset provisions of the PATRIOT Act. The return of potential domestic terror attacks to the headlines should serve as a wake-up call for Congress and the Administration that counterterrorism is not a fad or a political tool: It is about sending a clear message that the U.S. will not back

down when it comes to keeping Americans free, safe, and prosperous.

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