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Another Terror Plot Foiled: 27 Since 9/11

Jena Baker McNeill and Jessica Zuckerman

An arrest on Wednesday of Boston resident Tarek Mehanna brings the latest number of known terrorist plots foiled since 9/11 to 27. Following closely on the heels of three terrorist-related arrests last month, Mehanna's arrest is a stark reminder of the danger still posed by terrorists seeking to kill Americans in the name of extremism.

This most recent plot once again proves the efficacy of increased terrorism investigatory and information-sharing measures and serves as a reminder to Congress and President Obama that these measures must be preserved and expanded.

The Mehanna Plot. Appearing in court just hours after his arrest, Mehanna was charged with conspiracy to kill two U.S. politicians, American troops in Iraq, and civilians in local shopping malls. Mehanna's co-conspirators included Ahmad Abousamra, whom authorities say is now in Syria, and an unnamed man who is said to be cooperating in the investigation.

From 2001 through May 2008, Mehanna allegedly worked with the two men to plan attacks on the two U.S. politicians and to "kill, kidnap, maim, or injure" soldiers abroad. However, after several failed attempts to join terror groups or train at Taliban camps in Iraq, Yemen, and Pakistan, the plotters allegedly began to focus on broader domestic attacks, seeking to obtain automatic weapons to kill countless civilians in local malls. It appears that the men gained inspiration from the 2002 beltway sniper attacks and justified such attacks through the belief that U.S. civilians who pay taxes to the U.S. government are "nonbelievers."

Mehanna and his co-conspirators were said to have frequently discussed conducting jihad against Americans and had often expressed a desire to die as martyrs. Mehanna himself has one previous arrest for lying to the FBI about the location of Daniel Maldonado, who had plotted with al-Qaeda to overthrow the Syrian government.

The Path Ahead. It is clear that, since 9/11, great progress has been made in developing counterterrorism measures. The creation of the Department of Homeland Security in 2002 was the first in a series of steps taken to lower the barriers for law enforcement in fighting terrorism—changes that have sparked collaboration between federal, state, local, and international entities to increase American security.

Specifically, the Patriot Act has allowed law enforcement to use many of the same capabilities they have long employed to fight basic crime to fight terrorism. Bottom-up partnerships, such as Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF)—which had a role in the foiling of the Mehanna plot as well as other recent plots—have created the inter-governmental information-sharing and collaboration that has long been lacking. Further, international immigration and information-sharing agreements

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increased collective security and global partnerships, as seen in the Visa Waiver Program (VWP).

Congress and the Administration must not lose sight of these achievements and should work to continue development of America's counterterrorism capabilities by:

- **Reauthorizing key provisions of the Patriot Act.** The Patriot Act, along with the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA), safeguards the investigatory and information-sharing powers of U.S. law enforcement. However, three key provisions within the Patriot Act are set to expire at the end of this year. Congress should support these vital counterterrorism measures.
- **Expanding the VWP.** The VWP was revised and expanded in 2007 and now serves not only to improve public diplomacy but to strengthen collective security and further economic growth. However, expansion of the program—which allows pre-screened travelers from member nations to travel to the U.S. without a visa for up to 90 days—has been halted. Allowing additional countries to join the program would increase international partnerships on global security matters. Furthermore, the VWP ensures that travel information is transmitted before visitors to the U.S. even board a plane—thereby allowing officials to intercept terrorists before they reach American soil. The White House should stop blocking the expansion of the VWP and examine allowing nations already seeking membership to join in the partnership for global security.
- **Making information-sharing a top priority.** Information-sharing programs such as the JTTF have proved time and time again to be essential counterterrorism tools. Most recently, these pro-

grams were critical in foiling the Zazi and Mehanna plots. The Department of Homeland Security should offer greater recognition of the critical role these programs play and seek to expand them.

- **Repealing 100 percent scanning and screening mandates.** In 2007, Congress passed the Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act, which created the mandate that 100 percent of cargo entering U.S. ports must be scanned and screened by 2012. Secretary Napolitano herself has said that this mandate is not feasible and will not happen, yet Congress continues to divert precious resources to it. The 100 percent screening mandate will only slow down the supply chain and decrease U.S. security. Congress should instead continue with more viable risk-based approaches such as the Proliferation Security Initiative and the Customs Trade Partnership against Terrorism, voluntary programs that allow for effective screening of high-risk cargo.

A Renewed Call for Vigilance. Four terrorist plots have been foiled in a mere month. This fact should serve as a sobering reminder that, eight years after 9/11, the need for strong counterterrorism measures has not waned. Wednesday's foiled attacks coupled with the other three recently thwarted plots should serve as a renewed call to Congress and the Administration for vigilance against the terrorist threat.

—Jena Baker McNeill is Policy Analyst for Homeland Security, and Jessica Zuckerman is a Research Assistant, in the Douglas and Sarah Allison Center for Foreign Policy Studies, a division of the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for International Studies, at The Heritage Foundation.