

Terror Attack Shows Difficulty ID'ing Terrorists

BY ERIC TUCKER
AND BRIAN MELLEY
Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — By the time the married couple who carried out the deadly San Bernardino terrorist attack came to the attention of police, it was far too late.

Syed Rizwan Farook and his wife, Tashfeen Malik, had gone undetected while planning the massacre that included amassing thousands of rounds of ammunition, high-powered guns and pipe bombs.

The FBI's acknowledgment that the San Bernardino shooters had been radicalized Muslims for "quite some time" points to the difficulty discovering potential terrorists who keep a very low profile and shows the deadly consequences that can occur when identification comes too late.

"It appears these people were very good at hiding their intentions," said David Schanzer, a Duke University public policy professor who runs a center that studies terrorism. "What this situation shows is it's not a fool-proof system. ... A hundred percent prevention is not achievable."

The couple, who lived quietly in a two-bedroom townhouse with their 6-month-old daughter and Farook's mother, had not come to the attention of law enforcement before clothing themselves in black, donning face masks and bursting into an annual festive meeting of Farook's county health department colleagues with guns blazing. They killed 14 people and wounded 21 last Wednesday before dying in a shootout with police about four hours later.

David Bowdich, chief of the FBI's Los Angeles office, told reporters the agency was searching for how and where radicalization occurred and who might have led them to those beliefs.

Investigators believe Malik radicalized before meeting Farook, FBI spokeswoman Laura Emiller said Tuesday, though she didn't elaborate on what led the FBI to that conclu-



WALLY SKALI/LOS ANGELES TIMES/TNS
Monica Gonzales relights candles on Tuesday at a memorial for the shooting rampage in San Bernardino.

sion. Farook, 28, a restaurant inspector born in the U.S. to a Pakistani family, radicalized before Malik, 29, emigrated to the U.S. from Pakistan in July 2014 on a fiancée visa and married him the next month.

America's counterterrorism infrastructure has had success flagging individuals who try to travel abroad to fight alongside militants, fund operations overseas or who communicate online with overseas terrorists. But it's been far more challenging for law enforcement to identify each and every individual who self-radicalizes online, a process the Islamic State has facilitated with slick Internet propaganda aimed at the disaffected.

"They're not communicating with a terrorist organization, they're not doing those other things that we have typically looked for when we're looking for terrorists," said John Cohen, a former Homeland Security Department counterterrorism coordinator.

Behavior in isolation isn't likely to put a defendant on law enforcement's radar. But sudden withdrawal from friends or family, for instance, starts hitting trip wires when

combined with other actions, such as increased visits to hate-spewing chat rooms or radical change in appearance. Even then, law enforcement is challenged on a daily basis in separating individuals who hold radical views, which in and of itself is not a crime, from those who are plotting acts of violence or encouraging others in that direction.

"It's a highly individualized process, and each person is different," said Seamus Hughes, deputy director of the Program on Extremism at George Washington University's Center for Cyber & Homeland Security, which recently issued a study showing that 56 people had been charged in the U.S. this year in connection with supporting the Islamic State. "The radicalization process could take a few years, it could take a few months."

Mike German, a national security fellow at New York University Law School and a former FBI agent, said the government's model to predict who will become a terrorist is flawed, partly because it focuses too much on those who adhere to a radical or extreme ideology.

"Certainly some of the people who become terrorists have expressed extreme thoughts before, but it's not a causal factor," German said. "There are many times more people holding radical beliefs who never engage in violent activity."

FBI agents currently have hundreds of open inquiries in all 50 states related to terrorist ideology. When they identify someone they think is predisposed to violence, they've turned to a range of techniques — including sting operations involving informants and inoperable weapons and placing undercover agents in chat rooms — as part of their investigation.

They're nonetheless constrained under Justice Department regulations in the investigative steps they may take. That guidance, known as the Domestic Investigations and Operations Manual, permits agents to check out a citizen's suspicion even when there's minimal factual basis for doing so.

Trump's Ban Idea Causes GOP Chaos

WASHINGTON (AP) — Donald Trump's plan to ban Muslims from entering the United States is shoving the Republican Party to the edge of chaos, abruptly pitting GOP leaders against their own presidential front-runner and jeopardizing the party's longtime drive to attract minorities.

Unbowed, Trump fired a searing warning Tuesday via Twitter to fellow Republicans carping about his proposal. A majority of his supporters, he tweeted, "would vote for me if I departed the GOP & ran as an independent."

The crossfire between Trump and frustrated Republicans became a furious blur the day after the billionaire businessman announced his plan. Beleaguered 2016 rivals condemned his proposal and complained that his divisive positions were dominating attention in the crowded Republican contest. Party elders, meanwhile, warned that too much criticism might indeed push him to abandon the GOP and launch a third-party bid that could hand the presidential election to the Democrats.

And Republicans up for re-election in the Senate grew terse in the Capitol hallways as they were asked again and again to respond to Trump's remarks — a glimpse of their political futures if the former reality show star captures the GOP nomination.

"This is not conservatism," declared House Speaker Paul Ryan, the Republican Party's top elected leader. "What was proposed yesterday is not what this party stands for. And more importantly, it's not what this country stands for."

Republicans Wary Of ME Immigration

WASHINGTON (AP) — With his call for blocking Muslims from entering the United States, Donald Trump may be tapping into deep concern among Republican voters about allowing Middle Eastern immigrants into the country, according to a new Associated Press-GfK poll.

In particular, a majority of Republicans see a high risk that refugees from Syria will commit acts of religious and political violence in the U.S., the poll finds.

The poll was conducted before Trump made his contentious proposal on Monday, so it does not reflect public opinion about the plan. But it indicates a suspicion of newcomers from the region where Muslims predominate and follows last week's shootings in San Bernardino, California.

The AP-GfK survey found widespread antipathy toward immigration from the Middle East, with 54 percent of Americans saying the U.S. takes in too many people from the volatile region. Among Republicans, about three-quarters of respondents held that view, compared with about half of independents and more than a third of Democrats.

While the latter numbers could point to general election risks for Republicans in taking a hard line against Muslims, there appear to be benefits in the GOP primaries.

Syrian Refugees Settled In Resistant States

DALLAS (AP) — Syrian families have been settled in Texas and in Indiana, the groups helping them said Tuesday, defying efforts by the conservative states' governors to stop their arrival.

A family of six went to live Monday near relatives already living in the Dallas area, said Lucy Carrigan, a spokeswoman for the International Rescue Committee.

"They seem very happy," Carrigan said, noting that they were put up in an apartment with basic furniture and a stocked refrigerator. "And it was almost like breathing a sigh of relief that they have arrived. This has been a long journey for them, and it's been a long journey for a lot of Syrian refugees."

Carrigan declined to make family members available for an interview, but she said they were not fazed by the state's fight or concerns that they might not be welcome in Texas.

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