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SEN. LIEBERMAN: Good morning, and welcome to this morning's hearing, which we've called "Violent Islamist Extremism: Al-Shabaab Recruitment in America."

This hearing falls, coincidentally, on an important date. This is the fifth anniversary of the Madrid, Spain, train bombings that killed 191 people and wounded another 1,800.

The Madrid train bombings were a turning point in Islamist terrorism, turning from a centrally controlled movement to one that had also begun to act, and has continued to do so, through autonomous cells, in some cases with direct links to al Qaeda or other international terrorist groups, (but ?) in some other cases no or very slight contact. This expanded the reach of violent Islamist ideology and made terrorism that much harder to detect and prevent.

We have, for instance, seen al Qaeda franchise itself around the world in the now effectively defeated al Qaeda in Iraq -- although there are some lingering elements still in a few of the cities -- in al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb operating in North Africa, and in Al- Shabaab, fighting and training terrorists in Somalia, which is, in part, the subject of the hearing today.

But the turn toward more diffuse and international terrorism is the reason why the radicalization of recruitment -- radicalization and recruitment of individuals in the United States by Islamist terrorist organizations has been a major focus of this Homeland Security Committee's work over the past two and a half years.

The committee has held seven hearings to date, the most recent one last July that focused on Islamist ideology as the essential ingredient to Islamist terrorism. And last May, the committee released a report titled, "Violent Islamist Extremism: The Internet and the Homegrown Terrorist Threat," that describe the influence of online content produced by al Qaeda, Al-Shabaab and other Islamist terrorist groups, on individuals like those who have now gone missing from the Somali-American community right here in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Today we are going to focus on what appears to me to be the most significant case of homegrown American terrorism recruiting, based on violent Islamist ideology. The facts as we know them tell us that over the last two years individuals from the Somali community in the United States, including American citizens, have left for Somalia to support and in some cases fight on behalf of Al-Shabaab, which, incidentally, was designated as a foreign terrorist organization by our government in March of 2008.

There are ideological, tactical, financial and also personnel links between Al-Shabaab and al Qaeda. Al-Shabaab was credited with sheltering some of those responsible for the embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania. Last month -- just last month -- al Qaeda released a video titled "From Kabul to Mogadishu," in which al Qaeda's second in command, Ayman al-Zawahiri, praises Al-Shabaab and calls on Muslims throughout the world to join their fight in Somalia.

Al-Shabaab meanwhile continues to release recruiting videos targeting Westerners. And those videos are surely being watched by some potential followers here in the United States.

In the most graphic and deadly example of a direct connection between the Somali-American community and international terrorism, Shirwa Ahmed, a naturalized United States citizen living in the Minneapolis area, returned to Somalia within the last two years and killed himself and many others in a suicide bombing last October.

According to FBI Director Robert Mueller, Ahmed, who was radicalized in Minnesota, is probably the first U.S. citizen to carry out a terrorist suicide bombing.

One of the witnesses on our second panel, Abdi Mukhtar, who is the youth program manager at the Brian Coyle Center in Minneapolis, which is a gathering place for young Somalis -- Abdi was friends and attended Roosevelt High School in Minneapolis with Ahmed. In his testimony, which I find very compelling and important, Abdi will explain how he and Ahmed had similar internal identity conflicts about being Somali and American, but in the end resolved those conflicts in very different ways: Abdi chose America and Ahmed chose Islamist terrorism.

This morning, we want to understand why, to the best of our ability, each made this choice and what we together can do to make sure that others, including succeeding generations of Somali-Americans and, more generally, of Muslim Americans, make the right choice.

I do want to say here that there is no evidence of radicalization of the Somali-American community generally. In fact, I would -- in my own vision of this, the Somali-American community are victims of a small group of extremists, who are essentially terrorizing their own community, who are recruiting and radicalizing young people within that community.

And, of course, our hope here this morning is to figure out how we can work together with the Somali-American community, with the Muslim American community, with law enforcement, as represented on our first panel, to not only protect young Somali-Americans and perhaps other Muslim Americans -- though we have noted in our earlier hearings that the Muslim American community, because it is more integrated, seems to have been much less vulnerable that Muslim communities in Europe to recruitment and radicalization.

Nonetheless, the hearing today and other evidence that this committee has compiled, shows that the problem, though it may be less severe here in America, is here. And that, I think, is what is jarring about the story that we're going to hear described today.

There obviously are people here in the United States recruiting young Somali-Americans to go over to Somalia to be trained to fight.

And, of course, as we will hear from our witnesses, and this committee will ask, perhaps worrisome -- particularly to us -- being trained to return to the United States to carry out terrorist attacks here.

The primary questions for this hearing, as I see them, are: Who influenced these young men -- apparently, at least 20 of them, maybe more -- to return to Somalia and join Al-Shabaab? Who financed their trips?

What, if any, role did local mosque leadership play in recruiting the young men to join Al-Shabaab? What role did the Internet play, both in the form of online content and e-mail communications from those who have already returned to Somalia, in recruiting and radicalizing the young men?

What influence does Islamist ideology in Minneapolis play in creating a fertile ground for Al-Shabaab recruiters? Will those who have disappeared use their American passports to return and then plan and execute terrorist attacks here in our homeland? And why does Al- Shabaab want American and other recruits from the West, when there are presumably plenty of young men willing to fight in Somalia? Those are important questions. They go directly to the mandate that this committee has had to protect the homeland security of the American people.

I thank all the witnesses who have come before us, particularly those who have come from the Somali-American community in Minneapolis. It takes some courage to do so. I think it takes both love of their own ethnic community and dedication to America that brings them here. And for all of that, we are grateful and look forward to hearing them.

Senator Collins?

SEN. SUSAN M. COLLINS (R-ME): Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The most effective border security system cannot protect our nation from homegrown terrorists, individuals living in our country who become radicalized and committed to a violent ideology.

Three years ago, as the chairman has mentioned, this committee launched an investigation into homegrown terrorism and the process by which individuals within our country could become radicalized and commit terrorist attacks.

Our investigation has examined radicalization among prison populations, as well as the efforts by federal, state and local law enforcement to counter the homegrown threat, as well as the role of the Internet in the radicalization process. This past October, however, the threat of homegrown terrorism took another disturbing turn when a young man from Minnesota carried out a suicide bombing in Somalia.

As the chairman has noted, the FBI director, Mueller, believes that this suicide bombing marked the first time that a U.S. citizen had carried out a terrorist suicide bombing. Although the bombing took place in Somalia, Director Mueller stated that it appears that the individual had been radicalized in his hometown of Minneapolis. Even more disturbing,

this young man apparently was not the only American citizen to have traveled to Somalia to join the terrorist group known as Al-Shabaab.

The dangers brought to light by these revelations is clear. Radicalized individuals trained in terrorist tactics and in possession of American passports can clearly pose a threat to the security of our country. Our discussion today is not just a consideration of counterterrorism tactics and intelligence gathering needed to counter this growing threat but also should serve to remind us that there is a personal side to this story. These young men left behind families who care deeply for them and who want to see them come home unharmed. They left behind a community which lived, worked and worshiped with them and which now in some ways lives under a cloud of suspicion, worrying that perhaps tomorrow their own children might not come home.

Two of our witnesses have traveled from Minneapolis to talk about this side of the story with us today. Like so many Somali immigrants, these are patriotic American citizens who have bravely come forward to tell their story and to help us to find answers to the questions that trouble all of us, the questions that the chairman has so eloquently outlined.

Let me add a few more: We need to better understand what drew these young men to adopt a violent extremist ideology with such fervor that they traveled thousands of miles to join a terrorist group.

As the chairman indicated, I am particularly interested in the question of why terrorist groups thousands of miles from our shores would recruit Americans, when there are plenty of willing recruits in their own country.

Is there an individual or a network operating within the United States facilitating recruitment or providing financial support for Al- Shabaab?

How can we better work with the American Somali community and with any other community where a violent extremism ideology might take root to ensure that other young Americans do not stray down the same path?

These are among the important questions that we will explore as our committee continues to examine the threat of homegrown terrorism.

Again, I want to thank the chairman for his leadership in this area and our witnesses for appearing today.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Thanks very much, Senator Collins.

In fact, this committee's investigation of -- well, really, our quest to answer the question, is there recruitment of Islamist terrorists occurring in the U.S. and radicalization occurring, began under Senator Collins' chairmanship and leadership, and it's been my pleasure to continue this important work in partnership with her.

Let's go right to the first panel. We have J. Philip Mudd, associate executive assistant director, National Security Branch, Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Mr. Mudd, thanks for being here again, and we welcome your testimony now.

You're going to yield to Mr. Liepman? Based on age or lack of hair? (Laughter.)

On the top of his head, I mean. Okay.

MR. LIEPMAN: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: All right. (Laughs.) Let me just introduce you. You can rebut, if you like, Mr. Liepman.

Andrew Liepman is the deputy director for intelligence of the National Counterterrorism Center.

For those who don't know, the NCTC, as we call it, was created as part of the 9/11 reforms, post-9/11 reforms recommended by the 9/11 commission. It is the central place, along with the creation of the director of national intelligence, but this is really the place where all of America's intelligence and intelligence-related agencies are working together 24/7 to share information, to raise information, and to make sure that the dots are connected in a way that they were not before 9/11, and therefore we were not able to present that tragic event.

So with that, Mr. Liepman, thank you.

MR. LIEPMAN: Thank you, Chairman Lieberman, Ranking Member Collins. We welcome the opportunity to appear before you today to share our perspectives on the radicalization of Somali youth in America. And I do appreciate the opportunity to appear beside my long-time colleague Mr. Mudd from the bureau.

I'll focus on what factors contribute to the radicalization and some of the particular vulnerabilities of the Somali American community. I will defer to Mr. Mudd talk about the FBI activities.

Let me start with a bit of context, very brief history of events in Somalia.

The turmoil and instability in Somalia dates back to the collapse of the government there in 1991, resulted in the descent into factional fighting and anarchy.

In 2006, following multiple failed attempts to bring stability, a loose coalition of clerics, local leaders and militia known as the Council of Islamic Courts took power in much of Somalia.

The Somalia transitional federal government joined with the Ethiopian forces and routed the Islamic Court militias in a two-week war. It's an important milestone. It also represents an important rallying point for Somalis, both in Somalia and in the diaspora.

Since the end of 2006, Al-Shabaab, the militant wing of the council, has led a collection of clan militias in violent insurgency, using guerrilla warfare and terrorist tactics against the transitional government and against the Ethiopians presence in the region.

Just to give you some sense of the Somali-American diaspora, they began arriving in the United States in significant numbers in 1992, following the U.S. intervention in Somalia's humanitarian crisis. The Somali American population is distributed in clusters throughout the U.S., with the heaviest concentrations in Minneapolis, Columbus, Seattle and San Diego.

There are a variety of estimates of the size of the Somali- American population. It's a fairly difficult number to give you with some precision. I think generally we accept the range from about 70,000 to as many as 200,000.

And despite significant efforts to facilitate their settlement into American communities, many Somali immigrants face isolation. The adjustment to American society has reinforced their greater insularity, compared to other more integrated recent immigrant communities, and has aggravated the challenges of assimilation for their children.

One of the main reasons that Mr. Mudd and I are here today, obviously, is the concern we have over the travel by some tens of Somali-American young men back to Somalia, some of whom have trained and fought with Al-Shabaab. The involvement of this foreign terrorist organization, the Shabaab, means we can't simply categorize this as homegrown violence. We are concerned that if a few Somali-American youth could be motivated to engage in such activities overseas, fellow travelers could return to the U.S. and engaging terrorist activities here.

Let me stress we don't have a body of reporting that indicates U.S. persons who have traveled to Somalia are planning to execute attacks in the United States. We don't have that credible reporting.

But we do worry that there is the potential that these individuals could be indoctrinated by al Qaeda while they're in Somalia and then returned to the United States with the intention to conduct attacks. They would in fact provide al Qaeda with trained extremists inside the United States.

So one of the main questions that we try and answer is, what causes the radicalization of a small but significant number of Somali- American youth? And the answer is complex. It's the result of a number of factors that come together when a dynamic, influential and extremist leader gains access to a despondent and disenfranchised group of young men. Sophisticated extremist recruiters target these individuals who lack structure and definition in their lives. The recruiters subject them to religiously inspired indoctrination to move them towards violent extremism. They target vulnerable young man, many of them refugees who came here as small children or who are the children of immigrants who are torn between their parents' traditional ethnic, tribal and clan identities and the new cultures and traditions offered by American society.

Among Somali Americans, the refugee experience of seeing a war- torn country, combined with isolation, perceived discrimination, marginalization and frustrated expectations as well as local criminal familial and clan dynamics make some members of this community more susceptible to this sort of extremist influence.

And let me stress, just as you said, Mr. Chairman: We are not witnessing a communitywide radicalization among Somali Americans. When I speak of the Somali-American community, I don't mean to generalize. Rather, I'm describing a problem limited to a small fraction of the community, most of which came to America to get away from violence, not too commit it.

The overwhelming majority of Somali Americans is or wants to be a contributing member of American society, trying to raise their families here and desperately wishing for stability in their ancestral homeland.

But as I said, the Somali community is in some respects more susceptible to the influence of extremist elements. A number of factors that have mitigated the radicalization among other ethnic religious American communities are less evident in the Somali community here. These include some level of faith in the American political system, access to resources to defend civil rights and civil liberties, and interaction with non-Muslims, and a greater focus on domestic rather than international events.

You asked about the role that the Internet plays in radicalizing Somali youth. It's not an easy metric for us to measure. It is clear, though, that access to the Internet and to such material on the Internet alone is rarely enough to cause an individual to become radical himself.

It is also clear, though, that the Somali-American youth who have traveled abroad to join and fight for Al-Shabaab were exposed to Al- Shabaab's extremist ideology here in the United States, both in terms of face-to-face contact with extremist elements and on the Internet, and they tended to reinforce each other.

The easy availability of extremist media on the Internet provides a range of themes that extremist recruiters can use to appeal to disenfranchised young men. As you mentioned, al Qaeda senior leadership in recent months have weighed in with their own support for Shabaab, praising it and defending -- depicting Somalia as a local manifestation of the broader conflict between the West and Islam.

I should note that this al Qaeda stamp of approval does not guarantee either greater success or enhanced impact. In fact, it could backfire. Many potential ethnic Somali recruits would prefer to join a group that is focused explicitly on Somali issues, rather than signing up for the global jihad and joining an al Qaeda affiliate.

Let me end with a couple of comments on NCTC's role in this process and refer to your reference to this being a turning point, the fifth year of the anniversary of the Madrid attack.

Indeed, it is a turning point in many respects. I think 2004, if we remember back, the office of the director of

national intelligence didn't yet exist. NCTC was in its infancy. It was then called the Terrorist Threat Integration Center. And I'd like to think that the community has come a long ways since then. In fact, Somalia represents a great example of the type of challenge that I think NCTC can assist in. It's the intersection between a foreign problem that parts of our community study in Somalia and a homegrown problem that our domestic organizations are focused on. And we in NCTC are trying to bridge that -- those two communities and, I'd like to think, helping in that effort.

And with that, what I did like to do is turn the floor over to Mr. Mudd for some comments on what the FBI is doing.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Thanks, Mr. Liepman. That was a good beginning.

Now, to Phil Mudd of the FBI.

MR. MUDD: Thank you for having me here. I think in the interest of full disclosure, it's a great pleasure to be sitting at the table with Mr. Liepman. He and I have known each other for almost a quarter century so it's -- having him refer to me as Mr. Mudd is going to be the source of great amusement later today. And I much appreciate that.

I don't really have an oral statement, but I wanted -- Senator Collins talked about people telling stories. I wanted to tell a story about how this looks to someone who in the past has looked at terrorism overseas and for the past three and a half years has been posted at the bureau, kind of to tell you the story of a complicated picture and, if I succeed, make it coherent in nine minutes and 23 seconds. So I'll give it a try.

Think of this as an example of globalization.

You know, if you wake up in the morning and want to know what's happening in the stock market, you look at the DAX in Germany, you look at what's happening at the -- in the European and Asian exchanges. This is an example of globalization on a different front. Talk about a couple of intersecting trends. The first, Andy talked about in 1991 the fall of the Siad Barre regime government, the rise of warlordism in the '90s, the rise of the Islamic courts in the '90s and into this century.

So the first trend, if you will, is ungoverned space, as people refer to it, a place where somebody like Al-Shabaab can develop training camps, a place that looks something like the tribal areas of Pakistan, for example, or the Sahel, Mali, Chad and southern Algeria. So that's your first piece. Places around the world that lack governance happen to correspond with places where you have problems. Yemen would be another example.

The second trend I would point to and that is, if you look at Bosnia or Kashmir or Afghanistan from the '80s after the Soviet invasion, you have magnets of activity for Islamic extremists. Somalia is a bit different. For example, Somali-Americans and Somalis in general did not flock to jihads elsewhere, but nonetheless, Shabaab has linkages to this global Islamist movement. Its leadership has linkages to al Qaeda leadership.

So I think the second trend I'd point out to, again, in the context of globalization is this is another example -- after examples in places like Bosnia or Chechnya of Islamist activities serving as a magnet for international jihadists. I'd point out that not only are Americans showing up, we've got Western Europeans, Brits. We had a Brit blow himself up recently in Somalia. We've got Nigerians, Chadians, Malians.

And the third and perhaps the most significant -- and I want to emphasize this because I think some will say, well, this is just another example of global jihad -- is the nationalist aspect of this. We saw change in the American community in 2006 when the Ethiopians invaded, and part of the draw for people in this country is to go fight for their country against a foreign invader.

So global issues, issues in the Horn Africa having an immediate impact, a ripple effect on communities in Columbus, Ohio, in Cincinnati, in Seattle and San Diego and in Minnesota; it's a real example of what globalization

means in the new information world. And I use the phrase information world advisedly. You have direct connectivity between Somalia and the United States. It doesn't have to be by the Internet. It can be by Skype or e-mail, friends talking to each other. And this is a very tight community where that kind of information is getting around independent of any Internet Web sites.

Let me overlay some more micro issues onto that sort of macro witch's brew of these trends of ungoverned space and an Islamist magnet, nationalism. You've got a community that comes here in contrast to some other immigrant stories -- immigrant stories, for example, of Indian communities or Pakistani communities, communities with doctors and engineers. These are folks who come here because they're escaping great trauma in their home country. They're working here in meatpacking plants, poultry processing plants, often not a great command in the first generation of the English language among their parents.

If you look at many of the people we're talking about, they're coming from single-family homes and, in particular, homes that are led by sisters or grandmothers or mothers where there's not a father figure. They're echoes of what we see overseas. Again, I want to emphasize that we are not alone in looking at this isolated problem. I want to sign up to what Andy said. This is not a community problem, in a sense. We don't have radicalized communities. We do have radicalized clusters of people, typically youths between, let's say, 17 and above, although we've seen efforts to radicalize kids as young at 12, 13, 14 years old in this country.

Like what you would see in Europe, it's not necessarily a Shabaab person in Somalia radicalizing a youth in the United States. These are issues within the community where people from these kinds of families might see an older brother or father figure who starts to sort of spot, assess and recruit, as we say in the spy business, someone who might be vulnerable and eventually sets them on a path to take a plane ticket to Somalia or Ethiopia or someplace else as an avenue to get into Somalia.

This is important because this is the kind of thing you might see in Western Europe or Britain. And in fact, in talking to my friends in even the Arabian Peninsula, we may think that we are much different from a place like Saudi Arabia, but you see that kind of cluster recruitment by friends or older-brother figures or community figures elsewhere around the world.

I think there's a popular conception from people in this country reading books or watching movies that there are terrorist cells where you have an established leader and somebody provides finance and communication. In fact, whether it's this problem of Shabaab activity or extremism in the United States or other Sunni extremism in the United States, more often you have clusters of people who are talking to each other. They don't have assigned roles. They don't know what they're going to do. They may never do anything, but they're talking about committing acts of violence.

They may radicalize off each other, as kids do in environments across the United States in schoolyards when I was growing up. I went to throw rocks at cars because the kid next to me said let's go do it. So you have clusters of youth who are talking to each other. There may be a center in the community of radicalization. There is not radicalization in men recruitment typically. It's recruitment into this circle and then kids are radicalized and spotted and may be seen as someone who will go overseas.

The last thing I would tell you to put this in context is we're talking about this issue today; we're talking about a particular aspect of this issue which is the Somali diaspora. We are here to work with communities. We are here to work with our state and local partners. We get terrific support on our joint terrorism task forces from the Minneapolis Police, the police in Columbus, from county officials in Minneapolis, for example, who are working within the communities. But we're not talking about radicalization among an entire community. We need help from the communities. We need them to talk to us.

It's of concern to us that people like this are coming from areas where federal authorities are suspicious people. We

have to break that down. We're not here to look at a mosque. A mosque is a building. A church is a building. A synagogue is a building. And a temple is a building. We're here to look at people who might be thinking about or have committed acts of violence or are supporting those who do so. This is about individuals who are small segments of a community and who do not represent the beauty that this country brings to immigrants.

I come from an Italian, Irish, Dutch, British family. And I see those folks in the same context that my family might have been in this country a hundred years ago.

And lastly, context within the FBI: This is a priority for the FBI; it's one of a handful or more priorities. We also have issues in this country about violent crime, expanding gang activity in this country -- MS-13, for example, other Latin American gangs. We have a major public corruption problem in this country. We have a massive mortgage fraud we're looking at in this country. And we have other aspects of extremism, extremism that might be linked to one of our key concerns, that is, continued al Qaeda core activity in Pakistan, Afghanistan.

We have fundraising for Palestinian groups. So I want to emphasize that we're not looking at a community. We are looking at individuals who are sending kids in the wrong direction. We want to work with families who are as concerned or more concerned than we are. And I want to put this in the context of a lot of priorities we have. This is not one of a couple, this is one of many, and we'll continue to focus on it but in the context of other priorities we have.

Thanks again for having me here today. I look forward to talking to you with my friend Andy.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Thanks. Thanks, Mr. Mudd.

Let me begin the round of questioning. We'll do seven-minute rounds and keep going as long as senators want to ask.

Is it fair to -- I heard you say this was a priority; it's one of several priorities, obviously -- that's what we understand -- the priority being not just the Somali-American community but the prospect of recruitment and radicalization of Islamist terrorists from America.

Am I correct in that?

MR. MUDD: That's right. I think if we have -- if you look at one of the contrasts with the European experience, if you look at a country like Britain, for example, and people have drawn parallels -- I think there are significant differences that make extremism a challenge in this country. If you look at Britain, you have pockets of people on the extremist side, first, second-generation, sometimes third-generation folks -- very dense, interconnected in places like Birmingham or Manchester. In this country, we see a more dispersed communities, more dispersed activity. Activity in Los Angeles might not have linkages or typically won't have linkages to what we see in New York or Arizona or Florida or Atlanta.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Okay, let me pursue this -- and I hear you.

Is it -- am I correct in assuming that the FBI is on the ground, so to speak, in the Somali-American community both in terms of outreach to the community -- which the bureau has really done very well generally -- but also investigating recruitment and radicalization?

MR. MUDD: That is correct. I would point to outreach, one. The second is we do have partnerships with things like local police in Minneapolis and Columbus. And the third is we have a substantial amount of investigative resources looking not only at recruitment but also the issue of fundraising in this country.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Okay. The number of -- I take it there's no doubt that there have been some Somali-Americans recruited, radicalized here who have gone to Somalia, correct?

MR. MUDD: That is correct.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: And the number is a bit vague. I've heard some people say at least 20. Some people say as many as 20. Some people say maybe a lot more because families are hesitant to report people gone to Somalia for fear that they won't be able to come back.

What's your best estimate of how significant this problem is?

MR. MUDD: I would talk in terms of tens of people, which sounds small but it's significant because every terrorist is somebody who can potentially throw a grenade into a shopping mall.

I would point out the reason this is fuzzy is, you know, as Andrew said, there's as many as a few hundred thousand just in this community, Somalis in the United States. There are thousands of people -- thousands -- going to the Horn of Africa every month. You can go to Kenya to look at game parks, and it's hard for me to tell you if somebody's going to a game park or going to Shabaab.

So I am sure that there are people out there that we're missing. It's a country of 300 million people with a lot of travel to this area. But I would put it in the range of tens of people.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Tens. Okay.

So accepting that as a baseline for purposes of discussion, assuming that tens of Somali-Americans have gone to train and presumably fight with Al-Shabaab in Somalia, I assume, from what you've both said that, therefore, we can assume that there are recruiters or leaders in the Somali-American community who are responsible, at least in part, for that movement of people. Is that right?

MR. MUDD: I think that's fair.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Okay. So now let me go to the question both Senator Collins and I asked, which is why would an Islamist terrorist organization like Al-Shabaab want to recruit and radicalize Somalis in America when presumably they can -- there's ample numbers to recruit and train for terrorism in Somalia?

MR. LIEPMAN: I'm not sure that it's to fill their ranks. I don't think they're looking at America, you know, as a broad recruiting ground to collect hundreds or thousands of fighters that are the vanguard of their force. I think they're looking -- first of all, it's a two-way street. I think they're accepting non-Somali fighters from all over Africa, from the United States, from Europe. In a way, I think it adds to their credibility. It raises their profile. It's a public relations bonanza for them to have a multinational force fighting the Ethiopians, for example. It makes it appear that it's not just Somalia versus Ethiopia but a broader conflict that -- particularly on the continent of Africa.

And I do think that they are looking for small numbers. And it's not just the recruiters coming to America to try and bring people. They're reacting to a demand among the small fraction of the Somali community who have said they're interested in going. So there's sort of a meeting of the minds there.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: From what we know about the way these groups operate, do you assume -- I understand the difficulty of making a judgment about the motivation. Your answer is helpful to us. But seeing the recruitment that we do see, do you assume that the local recruiting is being done at the request of al-Shabaab leadership in Somalia? Or is it self-generated here?

MR. MUDD: I would think of it -- I think Andy's right -- as more push than pull at this point.

A couple of quick points: This is a global jihad. There are people from Chad, Mali, Nigeria. And we should look at that in that context. But it's not like people in East Africa are saying, "I wish I had another five Americans."

Second point, it's important, the first wave of people we saw post-2006 -- 2006, 2007, roughly -- were not Somali-Americans. The first wave of people we saw were American-Americans, people like Chris Paul -- not in this circumstance but as somebody who was prosecuted earlier for fighting overseas.

The last thing -- and this is --

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Going to Somalia --

MR. MUDD: That's correct.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: -- for training?

MR. MUDD: That's correct, underscoring the point that this is a jihad issue that's not simply restricted to American Somalis.

The third and final point, it's important when we try to put this into the context of terrorism to understand what these kids are doing out there -- ambushes, convoys, IEDs.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Right.

MR. MUDD: This is a conflict, sort of a paramilitary conflict, and they're not necessarily getting training on how to develop a covert cell in Minneapolis.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: So the final question from me in this round: Obviously, some of these people are -- these Somali-Americans are traveling with American passports or papers that would enable them more easily to get back into the U.S.

I understand, Mr. Liepman, you said we have no evidence now that any of this recruitment for training in Somalia is being done with the aim of sending them back here to carry out terrorist acts, but it would be easier for them to get back in. And my question is, and this really goes to the NCTC, with all the cooperation among agencies you have: Are we putting up any special filters to watch out for the return of some of these Somali-Americans to America, for fear of what they might be inclined to do here?

MR. LIEPMAN: I would go back to something that Mr. Mudd said.

I keep referring to him as Mr. Mudd.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Yeah.

MR. LIEPMAN: I mean, I think the most important tool for us is the outreach to the Somali-American community, to know who's going to the Horn of Africa, for what purposes.

And you're absolutely right, they're traveling under American passports, which enables them to travel rather freely.

In terms of looking at travelers who appear to have gone to Somalia, for example, I think that there is an effort to make sure that that is being scrutinized fairly closely, to understand what it is they did there.

And just to reinforce a point I made earlier, the intentions of Somali kids who are going to Somalia may be very different than what happens once they get there, and they're trained with the Shabaab. And that is, I think, what we worry about.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Okay. My time is up. Thank you.

Senator Collins?

SEN. COLLINS: Thank you.

Let me pick up where the chairman left off.

Mr. Liepman, we know that in 2007 poor information sharing by the Centers for Disease Control with the Department of Homeland Security prevented DHS from identifying an individual with drug-resistant TB who was traveling back and forth on international flights. And two weeks ago, ABC News talked about that some of the individuals who had fought in Somalia had returned to the United States.

Now, regardless of the validity of that particular report, it raises the question of whether information sharing is sufficient within the federal government to ensure that immigration authorities at the United States handle any returning Somali-Americans in an appropriate way. And this is complicated by the fact that they are Americans with American passports.

So what is being done to flag these individuals should they attempt to return if there is concern that they've been engaged in terrorist training overseas?

MR. LIEPMAN: I'd just make two quick points on that. The first is, Senator Collins, you're absolutely right; this is a problem that is complicated by our attention to civil liberties and our desire not to restrict the travel of Americans without pretty good reason.

I do think that the information-sharing system that we are operating under now is far superior to that of three years ago or five years ago. We are not perfect, but we're much better. And we're much better in terms of knowing when an individual should be watch-listed, for example -- understanding, when we have a piece of information, that information is shared with the appropriate agencies.

What I think we're most concerned about is what we don't know about, those travelers who are going to the Horn of Africa, who visit Kenya and who we don't know went into Somalia. There's obviously -- that makes it much more difficult to control their ability to travel back and forth, if we're not aware of what their activities were.

SEN. COLLINS: Mr. Mudd, when our committee staff visited Minneapolis the local police officials expressed concern that they were providing information to federal officials but were getting little in return. Just yesterday, the chairman and I were briefed by the Markle Foundation, which was particularly critical of the information-sharing across the levels of law enforcement, the FBI, with state and local law enforcement in particular.

Could you comment on information-sharing, in this case with state and local officials? Because, obviously, this is very critical; there is no one who is more tuned in to what's going on in the Somali community in Minneapolis than the local police force. And it seems to me that a greater understanding could result if there were more information sharing.

MR. MUDD: I think a couple of things here.

First, I want to thank again the police departments in places like Columbus and Minneapolis. They participate with task force officers who are on our Joint Terrorism Task Forces. They have visibility from these task force officers into our investigations against violent extremists in the United States. They should have visibility into every aspect of those investigations. We also have participation of fusion centers across the country.

In terms of cooperation with state and locals, I'd point out, you know, the Somali community in Minnesota is probably 100,000-plus, and in many respects, in a place like Hennepin County or Ramsey County, where you have Minneapolis-St. Paul, the police are going to have better insights into the community than we do, not just because they're looking at the extremist problem with us but because you have gang and drug activity. There's more than a handful of Somali gangs in Minneapolis alone.

So I think there is visibility on the task force. There's visibility on the JTTF executives in those cities. I couldn't tell you how strong that is across an entire large police force. We have relatively small offices in these cities. But they're participating full time on our Joint Terrorism Task Forces, and this is a priority for those JTTFs.

SEN. COLLINS: Do you see Somali gangs as being a precursor to the kind of radicalization that we're talking about?

MR. MUDD: I don't see a one-to-one correlation between gang activity and recruitment and radicalization.

MR. LIEPMAN: In many cases, they're actually alternatives to each other. They will go down two different avenues.

SEN. COLLINS: The New York City Police Department has done a lot of work on domestic terrorism, homegrown radicalization, and in general, the police department has found that individuals generally begin the radicalization process on their own.

But in each case that NYPD examined, there was what the department called a "spiritual sanctioner," that provided the justification for jihad that is essential to a suicide terrorist. It's essential to the progression of the radicalization process.

Have you seen that in the case that we're discussing today? Mr. Liepman?

MR. LIEPMAN: Senator Collins, yes, I agree entirely with the New York study on radicalization. I think it was an excellent study. And we've actually worked very closely with NYPD, with their perspective on the ground.

And as I mentioned, it would be a mistake to look at either the Internet in a vacuum or at the influential leaders of the community in a vacuum. It's the interaction between the two.

And I think we found both domestically and overseas as well -- and it's the experience of most of our partners in the U.K. and Canada -- that perhaps the most important element of the radicalization process is that charismatic leader who intervenes and who, as Mr. Mudd said, spots and recruits a vulnerable young man and gets to him at the right point with the right message.

SEN. COLLINS: Mr. Mudd?

MR. MUDD: This is really important to understand because, I suggested earlier, I think there's a popular misconception about terrorism among people who sort of watch movies or read books and that is that there are these cells of people who operate clandestinely.

I used a word that I learned from NYPD. And they have some extremely talented analysts up there. That word is clusters -- clusters of people who bounce off each other. Internet content, in my experience, might help feed an emotional sense among a kid who's already bouncing off individuals. This is a people business.

So I would see the Internet often as a tool that helps someone along a path but not the proximate cause that leads someone to get a ticket to go to Mogadishu.

SEN. COLLINS: Thank you.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Thanks, Senator Collins.

I appreciate that there are three other senators here. We'll call them in order of arrival -- Senator Bennett, Senator Voinovich and Senator Burris.

Senator Bennett, thank you.

SEN. BOB BENNETT (R-UT): Mr. Chairman, thank you.

I apologize for being late. It's fascinating testimony, and I don't have any questions yet.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Thanks, Senator Bennett.

Senator Voinovich?

SEN. GEORGE V. VOINOVICH (R-OH): I thank the witnesses for being here.

Has there been any kind of a declaration by Al-Shabaab, as Osama bin Laden did in 1998 and declare war against the United States?

MR. MUDD: No, Senator. And I take the opportunity to just emphasize, al-Shabaab is a very different organization than al Qaeda. It's really an alignment of a variety of different groups. The individual fighters on the ground in Mogadishu and in the rest of Somalia may not actually reflect the views of their top leadership. And the top leadership does have identified linkages to the leadership of al Qaeda in Pakistan.

But whether that trickles down to the average 17- or 20-year-old fighter on the streets of Somalia is really quite questionable. They are devoted to the fight in Somalia. They are not yet, most of them, devoted to Osama bin Laden's global jihad.

SEN. VOINOVICH: So the fact is that, to your knowledge, there is not a -- there may be some indirect linkages but no formal linkages. And in terms of someone's intent there of having people come back from there and do something bad here, in terms of some of the things that we're trying to defend against, terrorist attacks and so forth, is there any indication at all of anything like that?

MR. MUDD: Clearly, one of the reasons why we're looking so closely at this issue is the linkages between the Al-Shabaab leadership with the al Qaeda leadership and the possible influence on the Shabaab agenda, which has, to date, been quite local, and then ultimately the trickle-down effect on the recruits that we've -- that are being trained with Shabaab.

But, no, as I said in my testimony, we do not have a credible body of reporting right now to lead us to believe that these American recruits are being trained and instructed to come back to the United States for terrorist acts. Yet, obviously, we remain concerned about that and watchful for it.

SEN. VOINOVICH: Well, one of my concerns -- and this is tough because we're concerned about things and we're -- I guess it's a dilemma, and the dilemma is, the more we talk about it, does it become a self-fulfilling prophecy?

It's like neighbors that don't talk to each other and, before you know it, they don't like each other. And I think more than anything else I'd be interested in is, what are we doing to make sure that we don't have something like that radicalized here in the United States and what's the community trying to do in terms of making sure that this doesn't happen? That's the big issue here. And it's got, I think, more to do than intelligence to handle this. And we'll hear from another panel, but I'd be interested in your observations about what is -- where are we right now and what can we do to make sure that we have a better situation, including maybe improving our relationships with the Somalis overseas. (Laughs.)

MR. LIEPMAN: I think you've got that exactly right. We really can't solve the problem simply through outreach to the American Somali community. It's an essential ingredient of the solution. I think this is essentially a Horn of Africa, and without attention to that decades-long crisis, we can't attend to one or the other end of this; it's really both.

MR. MUDD: I think that's right. From the bureau perspective, there's a lot of issues here that are well beyond our control, issues overseas that have to do with the motivation of these individuals.

For example, what's the impact of the Ethiopian withdrawal on a community in the United States? I think the impact is probably substantial because a lot of these kids are going over -- as I said, there are intersecting themes not only for an international jihadist movement but also for nationalist purposes, to fight the Ethiopians.

And domestically, there are issues here, I talked about, that put us in common with people in places like Europe and, that is, when you have families -- these are very traditional clan-based culture, sort of patrilineal culture, where there is no father figure there and where somebody comes in and plays the father figure, where the mother doesn't speak English very well, where you're working at a meatpacking plant or have to work a couple jobs as a taxi driver -- I mean, this is a classic immigrant experience in some ways, and it's a difficult social environment for these folks.

And so we can talk about looking at people after it's too late, those who are going overseas, but the underlying cause is motivations from the Ethiopian invasion or motivations from the environment of people who are escaping violence and difficult economic conditions are things, obviously, that are well beyond our control.

SEN. VOINOVICH: So a lot of it has got basically to do with some concerns of people that have come here that are concerned about what's going on over there and it's like a lot of other nationality groups.

The Armenians still want to do something about the -- go back to what the Turks did and we have a lot of ethnic groups in Ohio and there's certain key things, the Serbs in Kosovo, the Kosovars with the Serbs, and a lot of these things and you can deal with them and try to deal with them, but there's still things that are really ringing bells in those communities and people are upset about them.

And the question is, where does that level go to some other kind of activity?

MR. MUDD: That's right, and I should be blunt: other concerns about dealing with federal officials, for example, in a community where many people have immigration problems. So we're trying to build bridges through outreach and working with police departments, for example, and having people like our SAC in Minneapolis, our special agent in charge, meeting with community leaders.

I was just talking to one of the leaders behind me about traveling to Minneapolis, although I would like to wait until after the snow melts, as a native Floridian. (Laughs.) But the issue has to do with, as I say, things within the community -- it's a very closed community -- and their concerns as well about dealing with us, because they're worried about whether we're going to collar a kid if they come and tell us or whether there's other federal issues, like immigration fraud, that might come up. And, again, we have to work through that with our partners in places like DHS.

SEN. VOINOVICH: Thank you.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Thanks, Senator Voinovich.

Senator Burris, good morning.

SEN. ROLAND BURRIS (D-IL): Good morning, Mr. Chairman.

I'd like to welcome the committee (sic). This is a very complicated subject and I want to commend you all for the work that you're doing.

And my questions may seem a little naive because of the difficulty of the subjects, but, gentlemen, what I'm concerned about is we're talking about two separate situations, are we not? The Somalis that are voluntarily or either forcefully going back to get trained and, secondly, whether or not we're talking about normal American disgruntled citizens that are volunteering to go over there. Is that what we're looking at?

MR. LIEPMAN: To my knowledge, we are not aware of a situation where someone has been forcibly repatriated to Somalia. These are volunteers.

And I do think there are two things going on. One is that you have a generational struggle in Somalia, and on the other hand, you have an American Somali community that is in many ways different than other ethnic communities in the United States in that they tend to be a bit more isolated and more attached to their homeland than many others, so that the combination of isolation and a difficult process of integration into the U.S. and this linkage back to their homeland, I think, has resulted in more -- a tendency to be more willing to volunteer to go back than in many other communities. But they're not being forced to return, as far as I can tell.

MR. MUDD: It might interest you to know some of the experiences they're having when they get there, to give you a sense of what they think going over.

First, some get there and believe this is a place where Shari'a law -- that is, the law of Islam -- is being practiced and it's a great place to live, and some of these folks will never come back. Some get there and become cannon fodder. We talked about the difference between terrorism and insurgency, counterinsurgency. These folks aren't going over there to become part of terrorist cells. A lot of them are being put on the front line and some of them, I think, have been killed on the front line, from the United States.

And lastly, some are going over there saying, "Whoa, this is a serious war, there's serious lead flying," and they sort of lie, cheat and steal their way to get back, because they're in an environment where they say, "I can't take this." So they're coming home, saying, "That's not what I signed up for."

So there's a range of responses when these kids actually get out there.

SEN. BURRIS: So this question may have been asked, but you're saying that they're over either for the war or to defend their homeland. What is the danger, then, of some of those really coming back here, having been trained or given indoctrination to come back and try to do some of the jihad or 9/11 activities in America? And can we detect that type of person coming back and whether or not, if a person does come back and he was over there but he was not a part of it -- how do you distinguish that Somali as a person who wanted to come back and repatriate himself with America and not be classified as a terrorist that would do danger to our homeland?

MR. LIEPMAN: It's a tough problem. Set the groundwork, though. I mean, going to Somalia to fight with Shabaab -- Shabaab is a designated terrorist organization, so the distinction between Shabaab and al Qaeda is an important one, but those who volunteer to fight with Shabaab are also materially contributing to a terrorist organization.

That evolution from volunteering to fight against the Ethiopians in Somalia to embracing the global jihad and the al Qaeda message that espouses attacking the West, that's a difficult thing to detect. It happens inside their heads and it's very, very difficult for us to know, unless they tell someone, and I think reinforces the importance of outreach and interaction with the community, with the families who likely will be the first people to detect this transition from Somali defense to the global jihad.

MR. MUDD: I think this story will have a ways to play out. There was an interesting conversation last week with an acquaintance of mine who is a psychologist in Saudi Arabia who deals with their de- radicalization program and he made a distinction between disengagement -- in other words, for example, somebody coming back here disengaged from Al-Shabaab -- and de-radicalization. And his view, from working with many people, in this case, in Saudi Arabia, was if you want long- term stability with people like this, you can't have that stability if you don't de-radicalize.

So what I'm saying is if someone disengages from the fight but doesn't de-radicalize, long term, you have to think psychologically, is that going to play out in a year or two years? What if they find when they get back that the job environment is closed to them? What if there's another Ethiopian invasion?

And as a security service, we can't only be concerned about someone who has committed a federal violation. If someone has gone overseas to fight and comes back and this month seems like they've disengaged, should we assume that that person has de-radicalized, after they've already committed an overt act to go fight a foreign enemy? Boy, that's a tough one long term. So I expect that we'll have some echoes of this for a while.

SEN. BURRIS: And another area, in terms of the Somali community -- which my briefing tells me is primarily in Minneapolis, Minnesota, there's a major community there and it's where a lot of recruiting is going on -- has the community really stepped up to come forward from the Somali community to give information and say, look, we know that we've got to work in conjunction with all the U.S. forces to try to prevent something of this magnitude, even a young person going over there?

MR. MUDD: We've made progress, but we have a ways to go. The progress is you have communities with parents and grandparents and siblings who are concerned. We have FBI officers and people from police and our task forces who are watching people shed tears in our offices when they find out their kid is gone. Communities are concerned about recruitment from within and I think that will become even greater with the Ethiopian withdrawal, because you can't now say, "I'm going to fight the foreign invader." You're going to fight in more clan fighting. Especially in the past few weeks or month, there's been some very positive political developments in Somalia that I would think would make it a bit harder to recruit.

That said, we have a ways to go. Again, you have communities that, first, for very defensible reasons, are concerned about interacting with federal authorities. They're concerned about what we will do with their children. There's a lot of disinformation out there, and I should put this on the record. I hope some of the community folks in Minneapolis are watching. There are people out there saying that we will take their kids and put them in orange jumpsuits and send them to Guantanamo.

This kind of propaganda is hurting us from people who want to corrupt kids.

So there are community concerns in additional areas, as I said earlier, about things like are we going to look at immigration problems as part of this.

So we've made progress. We have great relations with some of the community folks that you'll see later today, a really great and heartening immigrant story, but we still need more community help to understand what's going on within the communities.

This is not simply a law enforcement or intelligence problem. This is a problem about integration of a community over decades.

SEN. BURRIS: Mr. Chairman, my time is up. If there's a second round, I might have some more questions.

But I'd like to thank the witnesses for their candid and forthright statements. I think we really have something we've got to deal with here.

So thank you, Mr. Chairman.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Thanks very much, Senator Burris.

I want to ask just one or two additional questions. If any other member wants to, we'll do that on a quick second round, because I want to get to the next panel.

I do want to make clear, first, Mr. Liepman, I think you answered a specific question from Senator Burris and it may appear inconsistent, though I don't believe it is, when you said these folks -- these young people are volunteering, that they're not being coerced.

But this is not pure volunteering, because, as both of you have said, they're being recruited, they're being affected by a "spiritual sanctioner" or leader or whatever. Right?

MR. LIEPMAN: That's right, and I didn't mean to suggest that -- what I wanted to say was they weren't being tied up and bundled into a plane.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Understood.

MR. LIEPMAN: But it is a process of mental coercion, right.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Right. It wasn't a thought that they just had on their own to say, "I want to go over and fight with Al-Shabaab." I mean, either they got it over the Internet or usually a combination of Internet and a spiritual sanctioner.

Let me ask this question, which has to do with the future: By total coincidence, yesterday the Senate Armed Services Committee had its annual hearing with the director of national intelligence, Admiral Blair, and with the director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, General Maples.

Senator Collins and I, both members of that committee, were there.

General Maples actually testified that from information that he's received, DIA has received, that he believes a merger, a formal merger between al Qaeda and Al-Shabaab is forthcoming soon.

We've obviously seen an increasing connection between these two terrorist organizations over the last year, particularly in online content, the statement made by Ayman Zawahiri of just a month ago in a video kind of embracing Al-Shabaab.

So here's my concern: If there's a formal merger between Al- Shabaab and al Qaeda, doesn't that raise our concern about the potential that the recruiting going on of Somalian-Americans here will result in people coming -- being sent back here or perhaps to other countries, because people are traveling with American passports?

In other words, if we accept the premise that al Qaeda has made clear that its intention has nothing to do or is not primarily about the Ethiopian invasion of Somalia but really is about world jihad, isn't there a concern that if al Qaeda and Al-Shabaab merge that this is really a game changer and that the possibility of these recruits from America being sent back here for purposes of attacking gets higher?

MR. LIEPMAN: The conversations between Shabaab and al Qaeda have been occurring now for quite some time. We've heard rumors of an imminent merger and it's been imminent for a while.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Right.

MR. LIEPMAN: So it could happen very soon. It could happen sometime down the road.

We have several precedents of organizations that have merged with al Qaeda and al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb is the most recent example. It's a couple years old.

And two years ago, when they merged, I think we had the same concerns as you just stated that that group would suddenly look beyond Algeria, look beyond North Africa, and start targeting Europe and the United States, and it has been much slower to happen than I think we were afraid of.

I think that a merger certainly increases that danger, and as the global jihadist philosophy evolves into the organization, they will be mindful of additional targets outside Somalia.

We see Shabaab really focused right now on the fight in the Horn and I think that it would take some time to develop the capabilities that really would change that mind-set.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Mr. Mudd?

MR. MUDD: I keep wanting to contradict Andy and I'm looking for an opportunity to do so, but I think he's right here. I think the word "merger" can be a bit misleading, because, I agree, I'm not sure this will happen.

But merger doesn't necessarily mean operational linkage to al Qaeda. I think people who look at al Qaeda through the lens of it being a terrorist organization are mistaken. This is a revolutionary movement and having someone on a beachhead of the Horn of Africa, who, regardless of operational linkages, raises their hand and says, "I'm part of the movement," as they've done on al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, al Qaeda in the Two Rivers of Sudan, al Qaeda in Iraq, these are representative of an effort by al Qaeda to push out the movement, not necessarily always representative of direct operational linkages that might represent a clear increase in threat to the United States, although, like Andy says, we've got to watch out for this. This is long term.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Okay, final one point, if I may, to you, Mr. Liepman. Of course, I want to report to you that my staff, which has spent some in Minneapolis on the ground in preparation for the hearing, has found some concern among the Minneapolis Police Department that they're not adequately involved in the FBI work here and that they have more that they can bring to the table with regard to their own longer-term interactions in a positive way with the Somali community in Minneapolis.

I know you're working -- you're on the Joint Terrorism Task Force with them, but they feel that they can contribute more.

The second is just to wrap this part of the hearing up, in a sense, in a way, of reassurance, because we may have said some things to alarm people here, but that the FBI is involved in an investigation which is aimed at -- we understand you're involved in outreach, as I've said, to the community, but you're involved in our investigation, which may result in the arrest of some individuals who are involved in the recruiting and radicalization.

Is that correct?

MR. MUDD: There are ongoing investigations and I think I'll sort of defer any further comment on them, but it's a significant concern to us.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Okay, good enough. Thank you.

Senator Collins?

SEN. COLLINS: Mr. Mudd, it's expensive to take someone from Minneapolis to Somalia. It's difficult. It's complicated to get a person there.

The evidence we have is that the plane ticket for the young man in question cost around $2,000. That's money he clearly did not have personally.

Where is the money coming from?

MR. MUDD: I don't think that the people who are going over there are all supplying all their own cash. I think it's worth understanding that like other diaspora communities, there are informal ways -- you're probably familiar with the hawala method, for example, which exists in this community, to pass money that are very difficult to follow. The vast majority of this money is going for remittances, the same thing you would see, for example, in a Sri Lankan or a Bangladeshi community.

Some small portion of that money, I think, is probably going to help fund these folks going over. I'm not sure I would buy your suggestion that this is really expensive.

If you're talking about tens of people who are going over in pretty difficult environments over there, not for high-end terrorist training but to become, in some cases, cannon fodder, you have a ticket, you have somebody at the other end who will be a facilitator, and then somebody who's in a general training camp with other folks. Given the vast amount of money -- vast -- extensive amount of money raised in large diaspora communities here, I personally wouldn't think it would be that hard to skim off a little bit of that in various places and fund some plane tickets for tens of people. Terrorism is cheap.

SEN. COLLINS: Well, I guess what I meant is compared to the income of the young men in question, it's not as if they have this funding.

MR. MUDD: I agree, and I'm agreeing that I don't think they're self-funding all this.

SEN. COLLINS: Right.

MR. MUDD: It's just part of the apparatus that we're talking about here.

SEN. COLLINS: That's my point.

I want to end my questions on this round by going back to a fundamental question, and that is, why recruit Americans? As Mr. Liepman said, it's not to fill up the ranks. There are plenty of people in country who would perform this role.

It also does involve expenditures that would not otherwise be incurred. It's difficult. There's a risk of being caught. And that's why I'm wondering if part of the reason is to sow seeds of fear within the Somali diaspora. I wonder if part of the reason is to create dissension, the kind of dissension within the community that we've seen in Minneapolis.

I wonder if it's, in part, the terrorists wanting to cast a cloud of suspicion over the Somali-American community that might lead to further alienation of some of the young people.

Could you comment on this issue further?

MR. MUDD: Sure, I think it's pretty straightforward. This is a push, not a pull. It's a pull in the sense that you have a jihadist environment where people from Somalia in this country, a few people might say, "I want to go fight," as others from other communities might have said, "I want to fight in Afghanistan" in the 1980s.

But by push, I mean people here who are saying, "I want to do this, I want to do this maybe because this is an example of a place where we have a foreign invader or an example of a place where we can live in a country that's ruled by Shari'a law."

I don't see -- you mentioned recruitment; I don't see people out there saying, "Man, can we have another ten Americans?" So I think it's a simple story of people saying, "I either want to fight for my country or I want to go live in a different social or religious environment," relatively inexpensive to get there, not people at the other end saying, "I wish I had more Americans."

In fact, in some cases, the Americans can be a security risk for them. Who are these folks who don't have -- who are traveling from outside, traveling from routes that might be vulnerable to exploitation?

So it's not always a plus for the guys on the other end.

SEN. COLLINS: Mr. Liepman?

MR. LIEPMAN: I agree with that and I think that's the case not just with Americans but the British recruits. There are communities around the world of Somalis who feel very attached to their homeland, some of whom have expressed a desire to go back and fight, and I think that desire is being facilitated.

SEN. COLLINS: But that's the key to me. I agree with you that, based on our investigation, that individuals generally begin the radicalization process on their own.

But based on our intensive study, there's almost always a catalyst, a person, the spiritual sanctioner, in the words of the NYPD, the operational leader in cases where the plot becomes operational.

MR. MUDD: I see where you're going. If I could take another shot at this, sometimes we think of these organizations, whether it's Shabaab or al Qaeda, as hierarchical, sort of pyramid-like, which is a classic American concept. You might want to think of this as hub and spoke. These are first-generation folks, whether they're on the small sliver who are involved in extremism or just people sending remittances back, all of them in independent communities across the United States have linkages back home.

So they all would have an independent way to call somebody and say, "You know, I'm going to send a few folks over and can you facilitate them when they get there, get to the right camp?" It's close linkages back home, close clan linkages, and those linkages are persisting since we've had the diaspora community starting probably in the early 1990s.

MR. LIEPMAN: And just to reinforce, I said before that it would be a mistake to correlate al Qaeda and Al-Shabaab too closely. They're very, very different kinds of organizations. Al-Shabaab is more of a movement of young people, with a wide variety of goals and clan affiliations.

So as Mr. Mudd said, you can make connections with Shabaab much easier than you can with the leadership of al Qaeda in Pakistan.

SEN. COLLINS: Don't you think that there's also a PR angle, for lack of a better word, to this, that if Al-Shabaab can say, "See, we have Americans; America pretends it's the best country in the world and yet we have Americans coming here to join in jihad" -- isn't that a play here, too?

MR. LIEPMAN: Sure, I think that's a factor. And it would be easier for the folks back in Somalia to respond to the desire to come by saying, "No, you're actually more of a burden than you're a help in our fight." But they welcome them, not just Americans but Brits and South Africans and Nigerians. So I do think there is an element of broadening the base of that opposition, first to the invasion by the Ethiopians and now to the transitional federal government in Somalia. I do think they are doing propagandizing.

SEN. COLLINS: Thank you.

MR. MUDD: If I could flip your optic, I would think of it instead, if you look at statements by people like Ayman al-Zawahiri, the second in charge of al Qaeda, as an organization and I talked about it as a revolutionary movement, saying, if you want to join the movement, if you're Nigerian or Malian or whoever you are, one of the forefronts is Somalia, and some of that echo effect, ripple effect reaches people in the United States who might be predisposed to join the movement already.

So their perception is -- Zawahiri, in a sense, might see himself as a statesman. He is the statesman responsible for the revolutionary message of al Qaeda and that message is there are beachheads, the beachheads in Pakistan, which is a difficult place to be as a foreign fighter now; Iraq, which is, as you said, Senator Lieberman, a difficult place; there's another beachhead, so whether you're American, British, Danish, Nigerian, come on down, we've got a place for you.

SEN. COLLINS: Thank you.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Thanks very much, Senator Collins.

Senator Voinovich, do you have any further questions?

SEN. VOINOVICH: Yes. I'd just follow up on the same thing.

In other words, the recruitment or the encouragement is coming to Somalis all over the world. So it's not just concentrating on the United States.

MR. LIEPMAN: That's right, that's correct.

SEN. VOINOVICH: Come on in and help your country out and incidental thereto may be that you're going to be helping al Qaeda. But you said earlier that there wasn't any, to your knowledge, formal links between them but there may be some informal relationships there.

MR. LIEPMAN: There's a formal link between the top leaders of Shabaab and the leaders of al Qaeda but not organizationally yet, no.

SEN. VOINOVICH: In terms of Shabaab doing what al Qaeda would like to do or something.

MR. LIEPMAN: We do not see that at this point.

SEN. VOINOVICH: And that the young people that are leaving here, the motivation for them is that they see a cause of some sort, and to your knowledge, there's not some big organized effort here to go out and find as many people and send them over to Somalia but that it's kind of spontaneous, coming from groups of people around that have different little tribes or whatever it is that have kind of moved here to the United States and some are more involved than others.

I remember during the Bosnian or the -- after the declaration of Yugoslavia that we had certain ethnic groups here in the United States that got involved and they weren't really trying to do anything to us, they were just trying to do something to the other people that were here in this country.

And so I'd like that to be very clear, because I think -- I don't want anybody to think that somehow, you know, the Somalis, this is an organized effort, they're sending them over here, they're sending them back here, and, look out because they're going to get involved in some terrorist type of activity, and that's where it's at right now, and as I mentioned earlier that our goal right now is to try to look at some of the reasons why some of them would maybe pop up and say, "I've got to get out of here and I've got to go overseas," and see if that can be responded to and probably that's got to be done right in the community among their own people to say, "Hey, here's the deal."

MR. LIEPMAN: Senator, I think you've described it well. They are going to Somalia to fight for their homeland, not to join al Qaeda's jihad against the United States -- so far.

SEN. VOINOVICH: Thank you.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Senator Burris, do you have any further questions?

SEN. BURRIS: (Off mike.)

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Thanks.

Mr. Liepman, Mr. Mudd, thank you for your testimony. I'm sure we'll see you again before long. Well, we'll subpoena you if you won't come voluntarily. (Laughter.)

Okay, we'll call the second panel now. Dr. Ken Menkhaus, professor of political science at Davidson College; Osman Ahmed, president of the Riverside Plaza Tenants Association; and Abdi Mukhtar, youth program manager at the Brian Coyle Community Center.

(Sounds gavel.) Let's try to change panels quickly and with a minimum of disruption.

Thanks so very much, gentlemen, for your willingness to be here. We'll wait just a moment until -- I'll ask our friends who are leaving now to leave as quickly as they can.

Dr. Menkhaus, we'd like to begin with you. We appreciate it. You've spent some time, probably more than most, in developing expertise, in doing research, doing some writing in the general subject matter area that we're covering here today. We're grateful that you could come up, and we welcome your testimony now.

MR. MENKHAUS: Senator Lieberman, Senator Collins --

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Could you hit that mike button, please?

MR. MENKHAUS: I did. I just wasn't --

SEN. LIEBERMAN: There you go. Okay.

MR. MENKHAUS: Thank you.

Senator Lieberman, Senator Collins, thank you both for the opportunity to speak here today.

I'd like to offer a few observations about the current Somali crisis, the role of the diaspora in Somalia and the question of recruitment of diaspora youth into the extremist group Shabaab.

Somalia has been beset by one of the longest and most destructive crises in the post-Cold War era. The Somali people have endured 19 years of complete state collapse, civil war, chronic insecurity and recurring humanitarian crises. An estimated 1 million Somalis are today refugees, scattered across the globe. This has been an exceptionally traumatic period for the Somali people.

Over the course of this long period of statelessness, Islamic institutions -- charities, schools, Shari'a courts and political movements -- have helped to fill the vacuum left by the collapsed state. Somalis increasingly look to Islam as an answer to their plight. The ascendance of political Islam is an enduring trend in Somalia, and in general terms, this need not be viewed as a problem for a threat to the United States.

The period since 2006 has been especially violent and destructive. In 2006, an Islamic administration briefly arose in Mogadishu and for six months provided very impressive levels of public order. The Islamic Courts Union, or ICU, was very popular with Somalis as a result.

Ultimately, hardliners in the ICU -- including political figures commanding a small, committed militia known as the Shabaab -- marginalized political moderates in the Islamic movement and took actions which threatened the security of neighboring Ethiopia.

With U.S. support, Ethiopia launched an offensive in December 2006, routing the ICU and militarily occupying the Somali capital, Mogadishu. Predictably, Somalis of all political persuasions deeply resented the Ethiopian occupation, and within weeks, an armed insurgency arose. The counterinsurgency by Ethiopian forces, and the Transitional Federal Government, was very heavy-handed, and within months, Mogadishu was the site of a catastrophe. Seven hundred thousand residents of the city were displaced by the violence, much of the capital was damaged, thousands died, and an epidemic of assassinations and assaults by all sides gripped the city. By 2008, the violence spread throughout the countryside. Three million Somalis are now in need of humanitarian aid, prompting the U.N. to declare Somalia the

world's worst humanitarian crisis.

For our purposes, two important developments arose from this catastrophe. First, it generated an enormous amount of anger among Somalis, both at home and abroad. This has manifested itself in high levels of anti-Ethiopian, anti-American, anti-Western and anti-U.N. sentiment.

Second, one group, the hard-line Islamist militia the Shabaab emerged as the main source of armed resistance to the TFG and the Ethiopian occupation. Shabaab successfully conflated its radical Islamist ideology with Somali nationalism.

In the eyes of most Somalis, Shabaab was a legitimate national resistance to a foreign occupation. Shabaab was seen by many Somalis as freedom fighters, not terrorists, even by Somalis who found their radical policies appalling and their rumored links to al Qaeda very worrisome.

In March 2008, the U.S. declared Shabaab a terrorist group. The many Somalis who had provided indirect or direct support to Shabaab were thereby immediately criminalized.

In May 2008, the U.S. launched a Tomahawk missile attack which killed the top Shabaab leader, Aden Hashi Ayro. Thereafter, Al- Shabaab announced an intent to attack U.S., Western and U.N. targets both inside and outside Somalia. Its principal focus remains the national struggle, but we are now formally a target of them as well.

Shabaab is today the strongest single armed group in the country, controlling territory from the Kenyan border to the outskirts of Mogadishu. It has links to al Qaeda.

But recent developments are working against Shabaab. Ethiopia withdrew its forces from Somalia in December 2008. The unpopular TFG president, Abdullahi Yusuf, resigned in December of 2008. A new U.S. administration has taken office and is reviewing its policies on Somalia. And a peace accord known as the Djibouti Process has forged a new governing alliance of moderates from the TFG and Islamist opposition, now led by President Sheikh Sharif.

Shabaab has been deprived of its main raison d'etre and now faces growing resistance from Somali militias allied with the new unity government. Shabaab also faces internal divisions, including tensions between hard-core members and those who joined the cause, mainly to rid their country of a foreign occupation.

Put another way, not all Shabaab members are committed jihadists, making it problematic to label the entire group terrorists. Somalis who were willing to support Shabaab when it represented the main source of resistance to Ethiopian occupation appear uninterested in supporting Shabaab in its bid to grab power and impose its extremist policies on Somalia.

Shabaab may well have hit its high-water mark in 2008, and now faces declining support and possible defections. If so, this is good news. It would mean that the threat of Shabaab recruitment among the diaspora will be less a threat in the future.

An assessment of the threat of terrorist recruitment among the Somali diaspora must start with an understanding of the diaspora's role in Somalia today. The principal role the diaspora has played over the past 20 years has been an economic lifeline to Somalia. Its remittances are by far and away the most important source of income in Somalia, estimated at $1 billion remitted to Somalia each year.

It's fair to say --

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Is that just from the U.S., or worldwide?

MR. MENKHAUS: No, worldwide. Worldwide. It is fair to say that the diaspora keeps much of Somalia alive.

The diaspora is also pressured to contribute to communal fundraising, some of which is used for good causes like community projects. In other cases, the fundraising can support militias, or even extremist groups like Shabaab. The diaspora does not always control how their money is used.

Somali business, political and civic life is increasingly dominated by the diaspora. An estimated 70 percent of the new TFG cabinet, for instance, holds citizenship abroad, and the new prime minister himself is a Canadian Somali, who has resided for years in Virginia.

In sum, Somalia has become a "diasporized" nation. Many Somalis with citizenship abroad return to Somalia often to visit family, check on business investments, manage nonprofits or pursue political ambitions.

This makes it increasingly difficult to draw meaningful distinctions between the Somalis and the Somali diaspora. Virtually every Somali enterprise, whether the shareholder group at a Coca-Cola bottling plant in Mogadishu -- which is still working -- or the new TFG administration, or Shabaab itself, is likely to have a significant diaspora component.

Extensive travel to Somalia and financial and other interactions by Somali-Americans with their home country should not constitute, therefore, a high-risk profile.

The Minneapolis case of Shirwa Ahmed and other youth who have been recruited into Shabaab raises a basic question that you have both asked this morning. Why would Shabaab actively recruit diaspora members? What can a diaspora recruit do that a local militia fighter cannot?

First, it's clear that the diaspora are not much value as rank- and-file militia for the Shabaab or any other fighting force in Somalia. Somalia is already saturated with experienced teenaged gunmen and has no need to import more.

In fact, evidence from the ICU in 2006 suggests the Somali diaspora, as well as foreign fighters, were as much a liability as an asset. They were unfamiliar with the countryside, often spoke the Somali language poorly, were more likely to become sick and required a fair amount of oversight.

But the diaspora are useful to Shabaab and other armed groups in Somalia in other ways. Their familiarity with computers and the Internet is a valuable communication skill. And, to come to the point of our hearing, a young diaspora recruit is, upon arrival in Somalia, entirely cut off socially and therefore, in theory, easier to isolate, indoctrinate and control for the purpose of executing suicide bombings. Were this not the case, it would be much less risky and expensive for Shabaab to simply recruit locals.

From this perspective, a young diaspora member who heeds the call by a recruiter to join the cause of fighting to protect his nation and religion is not so much a terrorist as a pawn exploited by the real terrorists -- those who are unwilling themselves to die for their cause but who are happy to manipulate a vulnerable and isolated youth to blow himself up.

In my assessment, a Somali diaspora member groomed to be a terrorist is of most utility to Shabaab for a suicide operation either inside Somalia or in the region of the Horn of Africa -- Kenya, Djibouti and, especially now, Ethiopia. The reason for this is that these recruits would need handlers, both to help them navigate through unfamiliar situations and to ensure that they go through with the attack.

I am much less convinced that Shabaab would be willing to risk sending a trained and indoctrinated diaspora member back to the U.S. as a sleeper for a future terrorist attack in the U.S. The risks to Shabaab would be enormous. They would not be in a position to easily manage and control their recruit. The recruit could even defect and provide damaging information on Shabaab to U.S. law enforcement. And even if Shabaab managed to send a totally committed recruit back to the U.S., a Shabaab-directed terrorist attack inside the U.S. would almost certainly have disastrous consequences for Shabaab, not only in terms of the U.S. response but from Somali society as well.

Recall that remittances from the diaspora are the economic lifeline of Somalia. Anything that jeopardizes the status of Somalis living abroad imperils the entire country, and Shabaab would face enormous blowback from within the Somali community.

In sum, my sense is that the threat of an American of Somali descent joining Shabaab and then returning as a sleeper to the U.S. is quite low. The threat still requires careful law enforcement attention but should not be overblown.

There is one exception to this assessment. A Somali-American who joins Shabaab and who is then proceeded to Pakistan or Afghanistan and who becomes an al Qaeda operative is of much greater concern. The reasoning for this is straightforward: Shabaab's agenda is still essentially a nationalist one, while al Qaeda's is global. Al Qaeda would not weigh the costs of a terrorist attack in the U.S. on the Somali economy and the Somali diaspora, whereas Shabaab would. A Somali-American acting through the ideological prism of al Qaeda would be more willing to serve as a sleeper than would a Shabaab member.

I'd like to conclude with just a few thoughts on the Somali experience with and response to law enforcement authorities, much of which has already been alluded to this morning.

First, Somalis have a long and unhappy experience with the state and the police back in their country of origin. As a result, not all Somalis view the state, law enforcement and the law as a source of protection and order. Some view law enforcement with fear, as something to avoid.

Behavior which appears to be evasive or untruthful can often be traced back to this generic fear of law enforcement and should not be misinterpreted. Sustained police programs to socialize Somali- American communities and reshape their perception of the state and the law are essential if this is to be overcome. They need to appreciate the difference between rule of law and rule by law and feel confident that the U.S. law enforcement system reflects the former and not the latter.

Some Somali households are likely to be nervous about any attention from law enforcement, not because of links to terrorism but because of the risk that U.S. law enforcement will in the process uncover other irregularities, including illegal immigration, putting the community's interests at risk.

All communities have their dominant narratives, and Somalis are no exception.

Their dominant narrative is a story of victimization and persecution both at home and abroad. It's very easy for some in the Somali- American community to interpret current U.S. law enforcement attention as yet another instance of witch hunting and persecution, reflecting a combination of anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim, anti-African sentiments.

Some flatly deny there's a problem with Shabaab recruitment at all. The only way to produce better cooperation with this community is through routinized communication that builds trust with local law enforcement and which gives Somalis a clear sense not only of their legal and social obligations as citizens but also of their legal rights.

The U.S. government needs to provide much clearer guidelines to Somalis about what constitutes legal and illegal behavior with regard to political engagement in their country of origin. If not, we run the risk of criminalizing routine diaspora engagement in Somalia.

The fact that Shabaab was not designated a terrorist organization before March 2008, but then was so designated, is an example of the legal confusion facing Somalis. Something that was legal in February '08 is now aiding and abetting terrorism. As you know, this is a question of relevance to many other immigrant communities in the U.S. whose country of origin is embroiled in war or whose charities have come under suspicion of serving as terrorist fronts.

The U.S. government cannot ask its citizens to abide by the law if the laws themselves are too opaque to be understood. And this is especially the case if legal charges can be made retroactively for affiliations with groups which

were acceptable in the past but then designated terrorist.

MR. MENKHAUS: Finally, it goes without saying that the main responsibility for policing Somali youth to ensure they do not become members of criminal gangs or terrorist groups falls squarely on the shoulders of Somali parents and community leaders.

To the extent that Somali communities need additional outside support to provide for a safe and controlled environment for their children to grow up, we should try to provide it. Most importantly, we need to ensure that first-generation Somali-Americans are growing up with a strong sense of being American citizens with all the rights and responsibilities that that entails. A Somali diaspora for a population that feels it belongs neither here nor in Somalia will be much more susceptible to radical movements promising their own sense of identity and purpose.

I hope these brief observations are a help to you as you exercise oversight on a topic with both important implications for national security and civil liberties. Like many U.S. citizens, I was greatly moved by President Obama's promise in his inaugural speech, "We reject as false the choice between our safety and our ideals." I'm confident that we can address the security concerns raised by Somali-American recruitment into Shabaab without violating their civil rights and those of the community. Thank you.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Thank you. I agree. It was very helpful. I'll have questions for you in the Q&A period. But let me just baseline ask you to give the committee a sense of the size of the global Somali diaspora as compared to the population in Somalia.

MR. MENKHAUS: Our estimates of the global Somali population are about 1 million. Out of a total Somali population -- of Somali citizenship, not the 4 million who are Ethiopian Somalis and 400,000 who are Kenyan Somali's --

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Right.

MR. MENKHAUS: -- of about 9 to 10 million. So roughly one in 10 or more are abroad now.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Okay. Thanks very much.

The next two witnesses come to us from Minneapolis. We again thank you, as I did in my opening statement, for being here to make this personal, to help us to understand what's happening within the community. Obviously, as I said at the outset, we consider you our allies, our fellow Americans and, in a very direct sense, the victims of those who are recruiting from among your families. First we're going to hear from Osman Ahmed, who is the president of the Riverside Plaza Tenants Association in Minneapolis.

Thank you very much for being here.

MR. AHMED: Thank you, Mr. Senator.

U.S. Senators Lieberman and Collins, I would like to thank you on behalf of the family members of the children who were recruited to Somalia, members of the Somali community and on my own behalf for inviting us to the congressional hearing committee. I would like to also thank you for Jamal Omer (ph), who is director of Somali -- (inaudible) -- who helped to (balance ?) a lot and (put ?) a lot of time.

We would also like to thank the senatorial officials who came all the way to Minneapolis on February 28, 2009 to meet with the family members and the community. Also I want to acknowledge FBI office in Minneapolis and its agents who work day and night to locate our children. We do indeed feel grateful of their extreme efforts.

The first time we became suspicious was when we received a message from Roosevelt High School saying that our kid, Burhan, missed all school classes that November 4th, 2008. That to us --

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Excuse me, Mr. Ahmed. Say his name again so we get it clear.

MR. AHMED: Burhan Hassan.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: And was he a relative of yours?

MR. AHMED: Yeah. He was my nephew.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Okay.

MR. AHMED: It was November 4th, 2008. That to us sounded strange and we were stunned. We roamed around the metropolitan area and even beyond, nationwide. We went to Abu-Bakar Al Saddique mosque and Dawa Mosque, called our building security, called Hennepin County medical center, hospital emergencies and the airport.

After that, his mother looked into his room and found that his travel luggage was missing. His clothes were not there and his passport was missing also. We immediately notified respective law enforcement agencies. We immediately contacted the local police office and FBI office in Minneapolis.

We have been up on our heels since we have realized that our children were mentally and physically kidnapped on November 4th, 2008, on Election Day.

Understanding challenges the Somali community in Minneapolis faces today: There are many challenges that the Somali community in Minnesota faces likes other first-generation immigrants. These include limited language proficiency, limited skills and cultural barrier, as well as the Minnesota weather. Most of these Somali- American families are headed by single mothers.

The system is an alternative approach but understanding it is also a barrier. The neighborhood, particularly the West Bank/Cedar/Riverside area, has limited resources that could be of value to the community members.

Perspective of family members of the recruited kids: The missing Somali-American children created anguish and fear to the immediate family members and in the general communities. No one can imagine the destruction this issue has caused for these mothers and grandmothers. They are going through the worst time in their lives.

Imagine how these parents feel when their children are returned back to the country were they originally fled from the chaos, genocide, gang rape and lawlessness.

There are five children among the many that were sent to Somalia: Burhan Hassan, 17 years old, senior at Roosevelt High; Mohamud Hassan, 18 years old, studying engineering at the University of Minnesota; Abdisalam Ali, 19 years old, studying health at the University of Minnesota; and Jamal Aweys, 19 years old, studying engineering at Minneapolis Community and Technical College and later Normandale College here in Minnesota; as well as Mustafa Ali, who was 18 years old, studying at Harding High School in St. Paul.

These Somali-American kids were not troubled kids or gangs. They were the hope of the Somali-American community. They were the doctors, lawyers, engineers, scientists and leaders of the future of our strong and prosperous nation.

For instance, Burhan Hassan was a brilliant student with straight A's and on top of his class. He was taking college courses, calculus, advanced chemistry, as he was about to graduate from high school. These classes were sponsored by the University of Minnesota. He was an ambitious kid with the hope to go to Harvard University to study medicine or law and become a medical doctor or a lawyer. All these youth shared common things. They all left Somali in their infancy like my nephew, Burhan Hassan. He was eight months old when they arrived at the refugee camp in Kenya. He was less than four years when he arrived in U.S. February 12, 1996.

Like his peers, Burhan Hassan never interested in Somali politics or understood Somali clan issues. Burhan grew up in a single-parent household. His immediate family members including his mother and siblings are educated. He studied Islam at a nearby Abu-Bakar As- Saddique mosque, like the rest of the kids since 1998.

Abu-Bakar As-Saddique was opened couple of years ago. Before then, it used be called Shafi'e Mosque in Cedar Riverside neighborhood area when Burhan started. He attended its youth group. These kids have no perception of Somalia except the one that was formed in their mind by their teachers at the Abu-Bakar Center.

We believe that these children did not travel to Somalia by themselves. There must be others who made them understand that going to Somalia and participating the fighting is the right thing to do.

To address the issue from a factual perspective, it is the dream of every Somali parent to have their children go to the mosque, but none of them expected to have their children's mind programmed in a manner that is in line with extremist ideologies. In the case of Burhan, he spent more than 10 years going to the mosque. This is evidenced by others who also attended the mosque.

One thing for sure is that the methods of indoctrination are highly sophisticated. The plan of Al-Shabaab is basically to destroy the world peace and they will turn every leaf to achieve that. Their mission is not isolated into Somalia but has far-reaching goals.

The Somali-American youth were isolated because they have been told that if they share their views with others, including their family members, they will not be understood and might as well be turned over to the infidel's hands. These children are victims in every side. They have been lied to. They were told that they will be shown the Islamic utopia that has been hidden from them by the infidels and the brainwashed parents.

Our children had no clue they were being recruited to join Al- Shabaab. We are getting a lot of information back home in Somalia. We also heard that when kids arrive, they are immediately shocked at what utopia is and all their documents and belongings are confiscated. They are whisked to hidden military camps to trainings. They are also told if they flee and return home that they will end up in Guantanamo Bay. They don't know anything in Somalia.

Why Al-Shabaab is interested in America and Western kids: We believe the reason Al- Shabaab is interested in America and Western kids is that these kids do not have any relatives in Somalia. They cannot go back to their countries for they will be told to the authorities by local Al-Shabaab recruiters. They are also very valuable in interpreting for Al-Shabaab trainers of American and Western descent.

They could be used for anything they want. They could be trained or forced to become suicide bombers in Somalia and they can do it out of desperation. For many of them, Burhan, for example, have no idea where he could go for help in Somalia. This the first time he has been to Somalia in his life.

These are basically the main reason why Al-Shabaab is recruiting from the Western countries.

Another issue of paramount importance is the fact that we are the first family members who informed the law enforcement about the missing of these youth. Family members whose children sent to Somalia were scared to even talk to the law enforcement.

We have been painted as bad people within the Somali community by the mosque management. We have been threatened for just speaking out. Some members of Abu-Bakr Al-Saddique mosque told us that if we talk about the issue, the Muslim center will be destroyed and Islamic communities will be wiped out. They tell parents that if they report their missing kid to the FBI that FBI will send the parents to Guantanamo jail. And this message has been very effective tool to silence parents and the community.

They do have a lot cash to use for propaganda machine. They strike fear on a daily basis, here in Minneapolis,

among Somali- speaking community in order to stop the community to cooperate with the law enforcement agencies. Public threats were issued to us at Abu-Bakar As-Saddique mosque for simply speaking with CNN and Newsweek and other media.

The other mystery is that they say something in Somali TVs at their congregations and say something contrary to that in English while speaking to the mainstream media or community.

They also told us not to talk to the media because that will also endanger the Muslim leaders. We have been projected as pariah within the community by these mosque leaders. We are tormented by the fact that our children are missing and in peril. These members are scaring us so that we stop talking to law enforcement.

Perspective on Al-Shabaab to attract young people to their cause: The most important factor on how Al-Shabaab attracts the young Somali- Americans is the indoctrination of the children; they are programmed to understand that it's their duty to confront the infidels.

There are youth programs that in some instances have some hidden agendas. These agendas include that whatever issues that might come across in life is twisted as being the work of the infidels. They have been told to understand that the Ethiopian troops in Somalia are casted as an act of aggression against the Islamic religion.

Al-Shabaab is not only interested in recruiting Somali-American youth but others in the Western countries such as U.K., Germany, Canada and Australia. The main reason for Al-Shabaab to recruit from these countries is that these youth have different view than a typical Somali in Somalia. They do not know much about Somali clan and have no political affiliation whatsoever.

There are some radical groups who were a minority in their thinking. However, when the Ethiopian troops came to Somalia, some Somali-American professors clearly declared the war against Ethiopian troops. This has been a scapegoat for their extremist political views. It encouraged radical Islamic groups in the U.S. who previously were not active in the political activities here and in Somalia.

In conclusion, we the families of the missing kids have been conducting an outreach campaign to reach out those families that has not come forward. We believe this is the tip of the iceberg. In our outreach, we have been very successful to help some families to come forward and trust the law enforcement agencies like we did.

Recommendation for preventing recruitments in the future: Educating members of the Somali community on the importance of the cooperation between law enforcement and the community; empower the families of the missing kids to continue the outreach to those families who did not come forward; bring to justice those who are responsible; create a special task force to combat the al-Shabaab recruitment in Minnesota, Ohio, Washington, Seattle and Boston; scrutinize the funding of suspicious nonprofit agencies that undertake youth activities possibly related to radical views; to investigate if taxpayers' money was involved in the brainwashing of our kids, because Abu-Bakar Center is a nonprofit that might have been getting taxpayers' money for the youth programs.

The mosque controls a large amount of money which is raised in these mosques quarterly or sometimes yearly fundraising which lacks transparency, huge amount of cash, and a portion of that money could have gone to Al-Shabaab group.

Secondly, we are requesting more connection between our community and the FBI. So the FBI has to do more outreaching programs to the community.

We need protection for our children so that they can escape the enemy hands.

We need our U.S. government to forgive these youth to enable us to find ways and means to bring back to their homes, and this will give confidence to many more families to come out of darkness.

Warning: Al-Shabaab recruiters have the agility and ability to change forms. They usually are well represented not only in certain mosques but wherever Somali children and young adults are concentrated, such as community centers, charter schools operated by Somalis. They could sometimes pose as Somali community leaders and advise politicians and other agencies that are outreaching to the Somali community.

Again, I want to thank you.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Mr. Ahmed, I want to thank you for your courage in standing up in a dangerous situation, including against some in the community, and the U.S. government really owes you exactly the kind of support and outreach that you ask for.

I will say this, I'll have questions for you, but the picture you paint is clearly not a situation -- the word "volunteer" was used before and I know the witness in a previous panel said he meant to say that they weren't coerced. But you're describing a situation, we'll get back to it, where these were not just young people who woke up and, after a period of time talking to their families, and said, "I wan to go back to Somalia." They were clearly, by your telling, radicalized, recruited, and then, if I heard you correctly, in the case of your nephew -- was it, right? -- Burhan Hassan, he just disappeared. He didn't tell anybody he was going. correct?

MR. AHMED: Yeah, he didn't tell anybody.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Okay, we'll come back to that.

Our final witness today is Abdi Mukhtar, youth program manager from the Brian Coyle Community Center, which I gather is a community center at which a lot of young Somali-Americans in Minneapolis congregate.

Thanks for being here, sir.

MR. MUKHTAR: Thank you.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Try to come as close as you can to the mike.

MR. MUKHTAR: Mr. Chairman Lieberman, Ranking Member Collins, and members of the committee, thank you.

Before I start my statement, also, as a parent who has children, I empathize and I send my sympathy with the family members who are missing their kids, and the majority of the Somali community or the American-Somali community sends their sympathy for the families.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Thank you.

MR. MUKHTAR: Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. The Somali youth issue is very important for me personally and professionally, and I am honored to have a chance to share my experience and expertise about this issue as a Somali youth issue expert.

My name is Abdirahman Mukhtar. I was born in Somalia. I fled Mogadishu, the capital city of Somalia, when the civil war started early January 1991 and went to a refugee camp in Liboa, Kenya.

I stayed seven years in refugee camps and the capital city of Nairobi in Kenya. I moved to the United States in August of 1998. After moving to the United States, I attended and graduated from Roosevelt High School in Minneapolis and went on to pursue higher education from the University of Minnesota, with a degree in kinesiology. I am planning to go back to graduate school for a doctorate of physical therapy in the near future.

I have been working with youth for over eight years, first, with the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Department,

then with the Confederation of Somali Community in Minnesota as a youth diversion coordinator, and currently as the youth program manager at the Brian Coyle Center.

The Brian Coyle Center serves as a central hub for resettlement assistance, social services, adult education, employment counseling, youth programming, recreation and civic engagement for the Somali community in Minneapolis and the metropolitan area.

The center includes a gymnasium, community room, commercial kitchen, numerous classrooms, a food shelf and a computer lab.

Along with Pillsbury United Communities, the organization that I work for, there are other organizations that have their offices in that building, including the Confederation of Somali Community in Minnesota; the Oromo community, which is an ethnic -- (inaudible) -- community; EMERGE, which is a community development; Somali Youth Network Council; Cedar Riverside Neighborhood Revitalization Program; the West Bank Community Coalition; Somali Education and Social Advocacy Services; East African Economic Development; Haboon Magazine and Somali Family Advocacy Group. All are nonprofit organizations.

Assimilating to the Minneapolis community: The main difficulty I had assimilating to the mainstream community was the language barrier, because I did not speak fluent English. At times, people had difficulty understanding me.

Second, I experienced racial and cultural misunderstandings. Many people in the American society were not well educated and did not know about my culture, religion and other differences.

Many of the Somali youth and their parents have similar experiences, such as limited formal education, caused by the Somali civil war and settlement in different refugee camps.

Somali students like me were enrolled into classrooms in the United States based on age rather than academic level, making it very difficult to succeed. When classes are challenging beyond a person's current capability, it often leads to students skipping school and dropping out.

Since parents have to support their families and provide food and shelter but can only get low-wage jobs such as assembly work, cleaning, temporary jobs and some of them struggle with small businesses that barely make a sustainable income, they don't have time to be involved in their children's academic and recreational activities.

Not only are families working hard to meet the basic needs to support their children in the United States, they also are responsible for sending money to extended families back in Africa.

The expectation of the school system on parents for parent involvement adds to the challenges for the Somali families and students.

Somali parents and the Somali community value education. When I started high school, I was fortunate enough to have bilingual teachers to assist me in my education and adaptation to the education system in America.

Now, due to the cutbacks and policies, Somali students don't have culturally appropriate programs and the support of bilingual teachers in their schools.

It was not easy for me to attend high school because my family back home expected me to support them, even though I was in my teens. I was encouraged to get a GED instead of finishing high school so I could get a full-time job.

Instead, I started working 20 hours a week at the Mall of America and continued to work towards my high school diploma. During the summer, I worked full time while also attending summer school to pass the basic standard tests in math and English.

In my senior year, I took a commanding English class at the University of Minnesota in order to improve and be ready for college. I was able to take this class through the post-secondary options program. Because of my GPA, leadership and extracurricular activities, I was accepted to attend the General College of the University of Minnesota, which no longer exists.

Somali youth today: Somali youth today experience the same barriers I faced as a new immigrant in the United States. However, they do so with even less resources than what was available for me.

Language is still a barrier as young Somalis try to achieve success. Identity crisis and cultural conflict are a reality for Somali youth, for example, Somali culture at home versus American system at school.

Parents expect you to keep your culture, while the American education system and way of life forces you to assimilate. Many have difficulties adjusting to the new way of life while facing cultural barriers that seem hard to overcome.

As a result of identity crisis and frequent challenges, many youth lose hope and start making poor choices. The current economic situation also adds to the problem. Since jobs are not available for youth, they become truant, getting involved in gangs and using drugs like their peers.

However, there are many successful Somali youth who overcome these obstacles.

Somali families tend to be large, mostly with single parents who are working to make ends meet. Many Somali parents also provide for relatives, thus reducing their income status and livelihood.

Even though parents care deeply for their children, this continues to be a strain on the support provided to Somali youth.

Somali families for the most part live in high-density housing in the lowest-income neighborhoods in the city. The Cedar Riverside neighborhood where I live and work has a median household income of just $14,367 a year. Let me say it again: The median household income which is $14,367 a year. The unemployment rate is 17 percent. That's according to the 2000 census. So it's much worse, especially with the economic crisis we are facing now.

Across the street from the Brian Coyle Center, in one apartment complex, there are 3,500 residents, of which 92 percent are immigrants and 1,190 are under the age of 18. This is the highest concentration of low-income children in Minnesota, some people say in the Midwest, and most of them are Somalis.

Many opportunities and resources are not available in the neighborhoods that Somalis reside compared to other areas in the city. Services are often inaccessible due to lack of appropriate local, city and state agencies offering culturally competent services to Somalis.

We operate our programs in a city-owned building, for which the park department doesn't even cover the expenses they are required by contract. So we manage with minimal resources.

When youth don't have access to healthy options to fill their free time, they fall into the typical trappings associated with youth issues, for example -- or with youth culture -- example, the Internet, peer pressure and cyber predators. Many Somali youth are nowadays involved with drug use and gang violence. This seems to be the biggest distraction because resources and many important opportunities are not available.

People without college degrees are limited with regards to employment. They are reduced to manual labor and factory work. Moreover, racism and employment discrimination still exist in many blue-collar establishments. This leads to problems such as high divorce rates and child neglect, because they are unable to provide for their families and other family members.

Somali youth report a high level of discrimination across the board. This includes schools, college, the media and the community and by the law enforcement. Discrimination is based on ethnicity, culture and religion. When I asked a group of youth, ranging age 10 to 20, what were their greatest challenge, 50 percent answered harassment by the police.

Because of how young Somali-Americans dress, even some of their own community members stereotype them.

Second-generation immigrants are different than first generation. Like many immigrant communities, there is a stark difference between the first- and second-generation Somali immigrants. Parents maintain a lifestyle that essentially is like living from a suitcase. They hope to return. They experience language barriers and have difficulty interacting with the larger society.

Second-generation Somalis are more settled and hope to build their lives here. They are more immersed in American culture and they are fully engaged.

Somali immigrants experience frustration with the education system, and new sets of barriers occur for second-generation immigrants. And the institutions often are not empowering -- for example, keeping students in ELL, even if they don't need such courses.

Second-generation Somali youth often speak English well but are stereotyped and wrongly assigned to low-level classes. Inner city schools still have a graduation rate for Somali students well below their white American peers.

Second-generation Somalis consider themselves Somali-Americans, but they experience stereotyping by the broader society, who sees only their ethnicity and religious affiliation.

Shirwa Ahmed --

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Mr. Mukhtar, excuse me for interrupting; you're considerably over the time we normally allow the witnesses. I don't want to cut you off. Let me suggest two things. First, you're getting to the Shirwa Ahmed story, so I'd like to ask you to tell us that story. We will then print your entire statement in the record. And then we'll draw out some of your recommendations for solutions in the question-and-answer.

MR. MUKHTAR: Okay.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: So why don't you see if you can tell us about your Ahmed?

MR. MUKHTAR: Shirwa Ahmed and I went to Roosevelt High School together, and we are both from Somalia. Recently, it was reported, as you said earlier today, that Shirwa was the first American citizen known to be a suicide bomber.

The Somali community is not a monolithic community. It's highly diverse. As a first-generation immigrant, I faced many challenges in my life, and I had many responsibilities with regards to supporting my life. I made decisions that reflect my history and experiences.

It's difficult to map out the lives of people. Many of my classmates took different paths in life and ended up in different roles. Some are highly trained professionals, some are in jail, and some are in the work force earning low wages. And some are in the United States Army.

When learning about Shirwa's role as a suicide bomber, people were shocked and angry because it goes against the Somali culture, and it's also inherently anti-Islamic. Many Somalis are not convinced that it happened, because the idea seems too far out of people's comprehension.

Throughout Somalis' history, particularly in times of war, suicide bombings never occurred. And this is -- this case I have been asked about the Somali -- would the Somali youth talk about Shirwa?

Somali youth talk more about March Madness, Kobe Bryant, the NFL draft and basic things, so -- but they talk about -- they face different local challenge than what the topic of this hearing is today.

I'll just stop there so I can answer the other questions, since I went over my time.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: No, no. Thank you very much. And we will include your full statement, and those of the other witnesses, in the record.

Let me begin my questioning. And let me begin it with you, Mr. Mukhtar.

So you knew Shirwa Ahmed. He was your classmate, I gather, at Roosevelt High School in Minneapolis, correct?

MR. MUKHTAR: Actually, he graduated a year ahead of me so, but we went to the same high school.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Right. And I gather a good student, serious student?

MR. MUKHTAR: He was a very quiet guy, good student, but as I told you, he was a class ahead of me.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Right.

MR. MUKHTAR: Yeah, so.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: So am I correct, as in the case of Mr. Ahmed's nephew, that this was a surprise when he left for Somalia?

MR. MUKHTAR: I only heard about the media, about his suicide, and when the FBI director mentioned he was the first American suicide bomber.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: So okay, I understand. So your contact with him wasn't close.

Based on your interaction with Somali-American youth in Minneapolis, how do you explain what happened to Mr. Ahmed?

MR. MUKHTAR: You mean what happened to Shirwa Ahmed?

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Yeah, Shirwa Ahmed, yes. How did he end up going to Somalia? Do you -- I mean, I -- you assume he was recruited by somebody?

MR. MUKHTAR: No. That's why I said, you know, I made my own personal choice, and there's a lot of my classmates who also are in jails or in gangs. So I don't know how he end up in that situation.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Let me go now to Mr. Ahmed here -- Osman Ahmed -- because in your testimony -- let me ask about Mr. Hassan first, your nephew.

Am I correct that he has called a few -- sometimes now from Somalia to talk to his family to tell them he's there?

MR. AHMED: Yes.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: And I thought your testimony was very interesting that -- I think I have it right -- that perhaps the -- here's what it said to me: that when they get there, they're basically -- their identity is taken away, their papers are taken away. So in some sense they're trapped. And that may be one reason why the recruiting of Americans goes on, because they're left with no way to get out so they're much more controlled by Al-Shabaab.

MR. AHMED: Yeah, that is the main reason they are recruited because the local Somalis, if they desire to flee

from their terrorist group, they have a place to return. They have a family and also they have protection.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Right.

MR. AHMED: But these kids they don't have protection. They do not (be ?) a clan. They don't have any family members back home, so they have nowhere to go.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Yeah.

Mr. Ahmed, in your testimony you used the word "they" several times, "they" when describing those who recruited and radicalized both your nephew and other young men in the Somali community in Minneapolis. And I wanted to ask you if you could say a little bit more about who you think "they" are.

MR. AHMED: Definitely, there is a minority group who are spreading this ideology of extremist and before they never come up and shared their views to the community until the Ethiopian troops entered Somalia. So at that time they could excuse.

After 2006 this minority group, they started spreading through mosques in Minneapolis --

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Mostly through the mosques.

MR. AHMED: Two mosques.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Yeah.

MR. AHMED: Even though we are also suspecting some other mosques around the U.S.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Right.

MR. AHMED: They changed the management of those two mosques to have a influence to the community. And that's what we believe after 2006 started recruiting the kids and also spreading their ideology of extremist.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: So you're convinced that it is people within the mosque who are having this effect on some of the young men in the Somali community in Minneapolis.

MR. AHMED: (Of course ?). Let me give you an example: These kids, especially my nephew, he was fully connected to the mosque. He doesn't have any friends outside.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Yeah.

MR. AHMED: He used to go to school, home and the mosque.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Right.

MR. AHMED: And there's no way you could get that ideology from the school or home.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Yeah. And that's a very important point. So his family doesn't believe in this Islamist extremist ideology.

MR. AHMED: No way.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Obviously he wasn't getting it in school.

Also, again to point this out, and it seems to be a pattern, as you described some of the young men who have gone,

these were, generally speaking, young men who were doing pretty well at school, correct?

MR. AHMED: Yes. All of them they were A students.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Yeah. And were all of them regular attenders at one or more or two of the mosques?

MR. AHMED: As far as we heard from their families, yes.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Yeah. You also advocated in your testimony for more transparency with regard to the funding for the Abu-Bakar mosque because, as you suggest, you're worried that some of the money may have been sent to Al-Shabaab. Why do you think that that's so?

MR. AHMED: Actually, that money is not only for Abu-Bakar mosque. There is another mosque, which is Dawa in St. Paul --

SEN. LIEBERMAN: In St. Paul?

MR. AHMED: Yeah. They are collecting quarterly, sometimes monthly, sometimes yearly. And they're telling the community that the money they're spending for expenses of the mosque and the salaries. But the community have questions about where that money really is going, and there's no transparency at all.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Yeah. So your concern, obviously, is that some of the money being contributed to the mosque is going to Al-Shabaab.

MR. AHMED: Actually, we are cautious about that because, one, there is no transparency. They can use that money wherever they wanted to use.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Right. I have a feeling Senator Collins is going to ask this question, so I'll begin it, but this -- as we trace this rather remarkable path that we believe, from people who have followed it, that Burhan Hassan, your nephew, took, that he went with a group of other young men, they split up, some went to Boston, some went to Chicago. They had many stops along the way before they got to Somalia, and the estimate is that this was being coordinated as a way to perhaps deceive people who would be following them but also it cost a fair amount of money. We estimate at least $2,000.

So is it fair to say that you would be surprised if Burhan Hassan himself had $2,000 to spend on the trip?

MR. AHMED: No way. No way he could get it. He never worked, so definitely there's a group who are organizing these kids from the arranging even their travel stuff. Even some of them, they cannot call the travel agents and get their tickets because of their age.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Thank you. I'm now going to yield to Senator Collins.

You've been very helpful to the committee.

SEN. COLLINS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Mukhtar, let me pick up where the chairman left off.

You gave us some very compelling statistical information about the low level of income of the Somali households in your region, so would you agree that it's very unlikely that these young men were able to finance their own trips?

MR. MUKHTAR: Actually, let me -- allow me to say that Abdisalam, who was one of the kids that left, I know him very well. He was in my youth program when I was -- when I used to work at Elliot Park.

So Abdisalam used to work. He had a job while he was a full-time student at the University of Minnesota.

Some of the other youth, according to the community members, had jobs. But I'm not sure who -- I don't exactly know who paid their trip and why because I deal with the challenge that face the young people every day. And the mosques -- the issue of the mosques -- the mosques are the essential life of Muslims, not only the Somali community. Every Muslim -- their essential life is the mosque, because we pray five times a day.

My kid goes to the mosque to learn his, you know, Islamic roots. So what happens is that this mosque is the community -- (word inaudible) -- not individuals. So we cannot blame the mosques. We can blame individuals. So it's wrong to say that -- I'm afraid this committee, they blame the mosques. You can create friends and foes, as it happened in 9/11. So please, I'm encouraging you; we want -- I personally want to know who's recruiting these kids, because every day, that's what I do. I want to make sure these young people make the right decisions. I want these young people to be productive citizens. So I have the right to know who's recruiting them. But --

SEN. COLLINS: You do believe that they're being recruited, though.

MR. MUKHTAR: There are rumors within the community. The only recruitment that I know, I know gangs who are recruiting these kids.

SEN. COLLINS: Right.

MR. MUKHTAR: And that's the local challenge that I face as a youth manager.

SEN. COLLINS: Mr. Ahmed, you made a really important point in your testimony that was different from the previous panel whom we heard earlier. You made the point that for these young people, America is their homeland, that your nephew was eight months old when he came to America, that he'd never been to Somalia. Is that correct?

MR. AHMED: Yes.

SEN. COLLINS: So, in your judgment, this was not a case, as far as you know, of his feeling this connection to Somalia that would lead him to volunteer to go fight for his homeland, because America is his homeland. Is that correct?

MR. AHMED: Yes.

SEN. COLLINS: I think that's a very important point here, because it leads to your conclusion that there is indoctrination or radicalization going on. And I'm not trying to put words in your mouth. But is that correct?

MR. AHMED: Yes, that's correct.

SEN. COLLINS: Obviously, the events of the last several months have clearly heightened the awareness of the Somali community in Minneapolis of the dangers of radicalization and the risk to the young people, your relatives, your friends, your family members.

A key to combating that radicalization is for individuals and community youth leaders, local mosque leaders, to be aware of the dangers before this radicalization process occurs.

To your knowledge -- I'm going to ask both of you this question -- was that awareness in existence prior to the disappearance of these young people?

Mr. Mukhtar?

MR. MUKHTAR: In this case, to -- (inaudible) -- no, because I personally -- we are focused in the local violence

issues. In the last year, while the Minneapolis mainstream violence went down by six points, the Somali youth violence went up six points. It's totally the opposite. We had six Somali young men who were killed by Somalis, gangs or other ways, last year alone.

I personally lost a volunteer who was a work-study I recruited on his first day of the job, Ahmed Nur Ali, his first day of the job, in front of Brian Coyle Center.

So I focus on the local issues. But on the other hand, we control our computer lab, because the Internet plays a role in this issue, as this committee reported in May in your report. So we control our computer lab. Places -- you cannot go to YouTube; you cannot watch anything. We don't allow MySpace or other social things.

So we -- (inaudible) -- youth are very -- (inaudible) -- when it comes to the Internet. But with this issue we're dealing with, I focus on the local issues, which actually, the community talks more before this happened.

SEN. COLLINS: Mr. Ahmed, in your judgment, was there an awareness of this risk to the Somali youth in Minneapolis prior to the disappearance of these young men?

MR. AHMED: Before I answer that question, I will clarify.

SEN. COLLINS: Yes.

MR. AHMED: We're not blaming the mosque. Mosque is our place, we worship. What we are blaming is the management. The mosque itself cannot indoctrinate for the kids. The answer of this question is --

SEN. COLLINS: That's an important distinction.

MR. AHMED: Yeah. The answer of this question is, we don't have to mix it for the gang activities going on in Minnesota and the missing kids. It's two separate issues. These kids, they can harm us in the U.S. and our security. But the gangs, they can only harm inside with the gang stuff.

So we don't have to always mix it for those two issues -- those kids who are traveling back home and the kids who are in gang.

When it comes to the Internet, I don't believe that Internet played a (game ?) or a big percentage. First time we believe they get indoctrinated might be the end when they get brainwashed. Ten percent or 15 percent, they could get -- (inaudible) -- from the Internet. That's what we believe.

SEN. COLLINS: When your nephew has called back home from Somalia, has he given any indication of why he left or what he's doing or whether he plans to return?

MR. AHMED: He looks like somebody who was instructing another person who was in there. His mom tried to ask a couple of questions. And he was keep returning, "Mom, I'm safe; I'm in Mogadishu, Somalia; I will call you back."

So a couple of times he has called his mom. She was trying to ask a lot of questions. And somebody maybe was instructing what to say.

SEN. COLLINS: Thank you.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Thanks very much, Senator Collins.

Senator Burris?

SEN. BURRIS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And Mr. Menkhaus, I want to thank you for your insightful information in that whole situation. It was really educational and informative.

And my questions probably will be directed at our other witnesses.

Either one of you all, do you know any adult Somalis have volunteered to go back for the war? Do you know of any?

MR. AHMED: There is no way that somebody who have best hospitals, best schools, live with the best of societies can go back and join the terrorist group.

SEN. BURRIS: So you say you do not -- to understand, you do not know of any of your --

MR. AHMED: There is no way a person who is in United States, have the best schools in the world, best hospitals, live with the best society in the world can go back and join the terrorist group. There is no way.

SEN. BURRIS: Okay, because, you know, at times you will see this has happened in America where the various ethnic groups are here as Americans and they've gone back to their homeland voluntarily sometime to assist. I wondered whether or not any -- do you know of -- so you said you know of no Somali adults that have gone back to say that we now want to try to defend our homeland or join the services. Is that what you're saying?

MR. AHMED: Yes. Let me give you an example. Even though some people they justify it for going back for fighting with the Ethiopian troops, let me give you an example: Last year, October 29th, there were two explosions in Somalia -- (inaudible). In that area, it's a peace (ph) area; there is no Ethiopian troops. So what are they justifying, those who are saying we want to go back and fight with the Ethiopian troops? There is no Ethiopian troops in Somalia -- (inaudible).

SEN. BURRIS: Now, another question: Do you two gentlemen feel any danger as a result of your coming here and testifying? You mentioned gangs and --

MR. MUKHTAR: No, I personally, as a Somali community member and a Somali-American, you know, I have the responsibility, and we all care about the safety of America. Let me be clear about that.

The Somali community is very peaceful, and we care about it. And that's why I decided to come, for the sake of the American country and Somali-American community, who have been victimized, because we have an issue of guilt by association. Not only the people that left, but in Minnesota and everywhere, Somalis are being considered as homegrown terrorists. But that's not who we are. There's people like us, there's people like Osman who are here to testify about this issue.

SEN. BURRIS: That is admirable on your part. That is what we do as Americans and as Somalis who have adopted this as their country. And I see that you're saying that this is your country now, and you're going to speak up for your country of America. Is that what you're saying?

MR. MUKHTAR: Not only me but the whole Somali community. Yeah, and that's why maybe this small number of people that have different ideas, but the majority of Somali-American and the Muslim community is very safe. And they consider this their homeland, and that's why some of them are even in the Army, to protect this country.

SEN. BURRIS: And that's what we call America. And I'm so proud of the Somalis who are here and have adopted this country, because, you know, I'm a descendent not of Somalia but somewhere out of Africa, which I don't even know where. And for you all to come to the country voluntarily and adopt this country as your own and to say you're going to make America even greater and make your family greater, that's what it's all about. I don't want to seem like

I'm lecturing to you, but you bring tears to my eyes when I see you're committed in that fashion.

So if you don't feel any danger and you are seeking to try to stop these young people from being recruited, do you know who is really doing the recruiting to get them over there? Who is doing it? If the mosque -- if the managers of the mosque or somebody's been picking them out, who's doing it?

MR. AHMED: First of all, I am comfortable of coming here and testifying, even though I was getting big pressure from the minority group who are leading some of the mosques. But I'm not clearly in danger at all.

The other question, which is who is recruiting, is definitely clear. These kids, they were American mainstream kids; they did not come up one night to go back to Somalia and have a ticket. Definitely, there is a minority group who are working, recruiting, financing. And I hope the law enforcement agencies will bring the justice soon.

SEN. BURRIS: So you're saying that there are investigations going on as to who --

MR. AHMED: That's what we believe, of course, yes.

SEN. BURRIS: Thank you, gentlemen.

No more questions, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Thanks, Senator Burris.

I'd just ask one or two more.

First I want to say, Senator Burris really was speaking for all of us. I mean, you're an inspiration. Each one of us is from ethnic communities that immigrated here. And, you know, I was always raised -- I was raised in a family that said that in America you didn't have to sort of try to be like everybody else to be a good American. Part of the strength of America was to be yourself, that from that diversity -- cultural, religious, whatever -- that you made America stronger.

And the Somali-American community is contributing to that. And may I say, the two of you, that you're setting a great role model for the young people coming up in the community after you.

I appreciate what you said about the mosques. And just to clarify from the committee's point of view, the problem here is not the mosques, the problem is, from what you've said, there may be some people -- one or two or however many -- inside the mosque who are using the mosque to recruit -- essentially to take away some of your children. I mean, obviously, one of the great things about America, First Amendment right to freedom of religion. And that's what the mosques are all about. So we approach the mosques with respect.

If we have any concerns, it is about people who are operating within them.

I want to just ask you this question: First off, we have good reason to believe that there is law enforcement work going on and that it is aimed at some of the people who are causing this problem and who obviously are a minority and don't reflect the interests or the opinions of the Somali-American community.

But generally speaking, tell us what the community is doing to try to combat this I'll call it an evil influence aimed at your children, and what, if anything, local or state government is doing to help you, and what can anyone do to help you bring your children to the right path?

MR. AHMED: The reality, it's not an easy task to find out really those who are involved. But as -- (inaudible) -- we tried every angle that we can get information. I'm working with the law enforcement agencies. Even we contacted back home in Somalia to get some information. And still we are working (to ?) law enforcement agencies. We're trying to speak with families, those who do not come forward, and explain they are not in danger and explain, if they come

forward and talk to the law enforcement agencies and register their kids, in the future, their kids, they may get protection from the American government. So it's not really an easy task, but we are trying to work and knock every door. And I hope one day we will succeed, that idea.

We did not get that much help from the authorities back home in Minnesota. Whether I'm talking to mayor or other officers, we have only contacts with the FBI and some of the local law enforcement agencies, and I hope we will try to go everywhere that you can get help.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Well, if there's a way we can help you, I hope you'll let us know. It's a remarkable story because we've found that in previous hearings that you wouldn't expect it, but the agency of the federal government that has the most outreach -- and I would say positive outreach -- to the Muslim-American community -- in this case the Somali-American community -- is the FBI, surprisingly.

I want to ask you, Mr. Mukhtar, a final question. From the work you're doing at the community center, what's your judgment about the extent to which radical Web sites, Islamist Web sites, extremist Web sites are being -- are having some effect on children? Are the kids going to use them a lot?

MR. MUKHTAR: Kids are tech savvy nowadays, and they'd rather use Internet than listen to radio or watch TV.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Right.

MR. MUKHTAR: So the only thing I would say is it's also under -- it's also in my statement under the recommendation, but what I will say is in (extreme use ?), you should be able, this committee, the FBI or the law enforcement should be able to control the Internet use.

Last year alone in America, 6,000 cyber predators have been reported by families. So you can imagine --- you know, that is the only people that are reporting that. They know that they can report this to the law enforcement. My community, my parents, they don't speak English, so there's no way they can report such things like that. They don't know anything about computer.

So it is very important that we protect our kids from the Internet, whether it's the Islamic extremists or other issues, but it is very, very important that we do that, yeah.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Very good.

Incidentally, this committee made some protests to -- about YouTube and -- which is now owned by Google, right? And they created a process where when we and any of you -- and we can do it -- you can do it through us -- can identify a Web site, they'll check it, and if they believe it's encouraging violence, they'll take it down.

MR. MUKHTAR: It's not only on YouTube, but it's also local medias. Each ethnic group has their own media, their influence. So you can also act to that. You know, you can filter that, too.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: That's a good point.

MR. MUKHTAR: Yeah.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Dr. Menkhaus, thank you for being here.

I want to -- your testimony was very helpful. I want to clarify because you've described a changing picture on the ground in Somalia, with Al-Shabaab somewhat in -- I wouldn't say retreat, maybe retreat, but waning somewhat because of changes and particularly because the Ethiopians are not there anymore. Is Al-Shabaab effectively in control of some parts of Somalia now still?

MR. MENKHAUS: Absolutely. It controls, again, all the border -- all the territory from the Kenyan border down to the outskirts of Mogadishu. It has some strongholds inside Mogadishu as well. There were fears that when Ethiopians withdrew in December that Shabaab might overrun the capital. That has not happened.

What we have seen is that there's been pushback, mainly clan militias affiliated with this new emerging unity government, and we suspect that's because Somali political and social leaders and business leaders in the country understand full well the severe consequences of a Shabaab takeover. They were willing to see Shabaab used to fight the Ethiopians but are not interested in seeing them come under control.

It's going to take some time. There's a process of both negotiation to co-opt some of the members of Shabaab and then marginalize the rest. But we do have some reason to believe that they're not as strong as they were and they're likely to get weaker.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: So let me suggest this to you as I listen to you and think about what we heard somewhat on the first panel but particularly from the head of the Defense Intelligence Agency, who, coincidentally, testified -- he testified about all the troubled spots in the world, but he -- this idea that al Qaeda and Al-Shabaab have been growing closer together and there may well be an actual merger, insofar as that's an accurate term -- that's the term he used yesterday, I believe, General Maples. Having heard that from him yesterday and putting it in the context of what you have told us today, it makes me wonder whether this is essentially as marriage of convenience, not only ideology to the extent that these are -- both have jihadists or kind of revolutionary world elements in them but that you have one group, Al-Shabaab, which is now in some difficulty in Somalia but still in control of part of the country.

You have al Qaeda now perhaps looking for a foothold, a sanctuary somewhere. It doesn't -- obviously it doesn't have it anymore in Afghanistan; they're now coming -- nor in Iraq. They're coming under great pressure in Pakistan FATA areas, but they're still -- they're there. And I wonder whether they're thinking that this may be to the great detriment of the people of Somalia, a kind of sanctuary for them.

MR. MENKHAUS: I don't think that they will attempt to use Somalia as a base and a major safe heaven.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Interesting.

MR. MENKHAUS: They tried that earlier.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Yeah.

MR. MENKHAUS: In 1993-94 there was an attempt by the East African al Qaeda cell to penetrate Somali-inhabited areas of the Eastern Horn, and it went badly for them, actually. It turned out to be as non-permissive an environment for them as it is for those of us who work in relief agencies and embassies.

I think that -- for al Qaeda, I think you're exactly right. This is a marriage of convenience. This is a low-cost, high-yield region of the world in which to cause mischief for the United States.

There's a lot of soft targets in places like Nairobi and Ethiopia and Djibouti that we -- that we have to worry about because of their involvement there, but they haven't demonstrated to date a level of commitment to, for instance, making Somalia into an equivalent of parts of Afghanistan or Pakistan, and I don't think they would want to. I think that there are other roles that Somalia can play for them as a transshipment point, as a temporary base for a handful of operatives but not a major base.

For Shabaab, I think it makes sense that they would be looking to al Qaeda now because their strength has always been their ability to project themselves as the Somalis fighting the foreigners, the Ethiopians, the West, whoever, and so for them, globalizing their struggle is really the only currency that they've got left.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Right.

MR. MENKHAUS: So, for instance, I worry now as their fortunes decline inside Somalia that they're going to be spending more time fighting inside Ethiopia and Somali-inhabited areas of Ethiopia because there they can portray it as the Somalis versus the Christian highlander Ethiopian imperialists, et cetera, et cetera.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Yeah. Frankly, it makes it all the more heartbreaking, said in that context, the story of these young Somali- Americans, good kids, good students, religious, getting swept up in this, ending up somewhere where they're basically trapped, and they become pawns in a game much larger than themselves but in which their lives are either ruined or endangered, unless we can somehow get them out.

Thank you.

Senator Collins?

SEN. COLLINS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank all of our witnesses today for deepening our understanding, for your willingness to come forward, and I'm going to ask just one final question of each of you, and that is if you had one recommendation to federal, state or local law enforcement on how they could best work with the Somali-American community to combat this terrible problem that is robbing the community of some of its most promising young people, what would that recommendation be?

Professor, we'll start with you.

MR. MENKHAUS: I'll go back to a recommendation that I made at the conclusion of my written remarks, and that is if we can provide clarity to the Somali community as to what is legal and what is illegal behavior, that would go a long, long way toward helping them understand how they can be constructively engaged in their home country and not risk crossing a line when they don't know where the line is, whether -- Somalis used Al-Barakaat, a remittance company, for years to remit money, and then in late 2001, we froze its assets and declared that it was an organization that as linked to al Qaeda, and that was an example of -- you know, who do I work with in terms of remitting money? With Shabaab, the same way. There's an enormous amount of confusion as to just what they can and can't do.

SEN. COLLINS: Thank you.

Mr. Ahmed?

MR. AHMED: All right. The main thing that we can -- I think unless we get the Somali community, only the law enforcement agencies cannot achieve the goal. So what I would like to say is now we have a place to start, we have the parents; those will come forward, those who already -- (inaudible) -- that the kids are going. Many of the group are recruiting. So I would say if we empower the parents, those who already have experiences, it is true that you can reach the other community and also to work with the law enforcement agencies. Unless the community come up and work with the law enforcement agencies, only the law enforcement agencies cannot reach the schools.

SEN. COLLINS: Thank you.

MR. MUKHTAR: I also made those recommendations in my statement, but the first recommendation is the law enforcement itself to work together, whether it's local, federal -- that itself helps. And in terms of the Somali community, the Somali community has the experts and the capacity to work with the law enforcement and a committee like you guys.

And lastly, I'll say Somali community should be educated about their rights and responsibilities, so -- and what we really need is a true partnership with the committee like this and the law enforcement.

SEN. COLLINS: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

SEN. LIEBERMAN: Thanks very much, Senator Collins.

I thank all of you for being here. I appreciate what you've said. We extend our hand to you in the partnership that you've suggested. We want you to keep in touch with our staff. We'll keep in touch with you.

I mean, bottom line, there's a problem here, and it's a problem that not only threatens American security, but it threatens something more fundamental, which is the American dream, the reality of the American dream for all the children who grow up here, including, of course, Somali-American children or Muslim-American children generally.

So this, as I say, is the most graphic and clear evidence that we've had thus far of a systematic campaign of recruitment of American youth and, in some ways, the most promising of American youth to leave the country to go fight a war that really will bring them to no good, potentially could threaten us here at home as well but certainly will bring them to no good. So we want to -- we've learned a lot. We thank you for your courage. We thank you for your testimony.

In the normal course of what we do here, we leave the committee record open for 15 days if you want to add anything to what you said. Some members of the committee, either those who were here or those who were not here, may ask you questions in writing. We'll ask you to respond to those.

But I really thank you all for what you've contributed to our effort to protect the security and the freedom of the American people. Thank you very much.

The hearing is adjourned. (Sounds gavel.)

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