

Report Exposes Scary Lack of Cooperation Between Homeland Security Entities

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On Dec. 2, 2015, Syed Rizwan Farook and Tashfeen Malik carried out Islamist attacks in San Bernardino, California, that claimed the lives of 14 people and seriously injured 22 others.

According to a report by the Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General, agents of the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services and Immigration and Customs Enforcement failed to cooperate in the investigation during the hours immediately following the incident. According to whistleblowers within DHS, Homeland Security Investigations agents alerted by the FBI that Enrique Marquez, who supplied the weapons used to carry out the attacks, was scheduled for an immigration hearing at the USCIS office in San Bernardino the next day.

When HSI agents arrived at the USCIS office to detain Marquez, they had to wait 20 to 30 minutes before accessing the building because the USCIS field office director incorrectly asserted that she had authority to determine who could and could not enter the building. The report states that the HSI agents should have been allowed to enter the building immediately after they had identified themselves and explained their purpose.

The USCIS field office director also incorrectly asserted that USCIS policy prohibited making an arrest or detention at the facility. The report also faulted the field office director

for providing HSI agents with only a photo from a suspect's immigration file, instead of the complete file which they had requested.

U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson (R-Wis.), chairman of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, and Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa), chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, released statements regarding the IG findings.

"The report from the Office of Inspector General confirms whistleblower complaints I received about a dangerous lack of coordination between Immigration and Customs Enforcement and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services," Johnson said. "The refusal to allow armed ICE agents into a USCIS facility to detain a suspected terrorist could have had tragic consequences."

He added that Congress specifically created the DHS to unify and improve coordination among agencies.

"What happened in the San Bernardino USCIS field office on Dec. 3 shows that work remains," he said. "I hope Secretary [Jeh] Johnson and DHS leadership take this independent watchdog report to heart."

Grassley said this was a "classic example of the left hand not knowing what the right hand is doing." He was outraged to learn that "agents we depend on to keep us safe" were blocked by officials within their own agency from conducting a "routine law enforcement action to prevent a potentially dangerous situation at a federal building."

"This incident shows the disturbing lack of collaboration between the USCIS and ICE—two agencies tasked with enforcing our immigration laws," he added. "Thanks to whistleblowers and the Justice Department Inspector General's report, these agencies can better understand their own policies, what went wrong and the need to prevent future breakdowns."

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