

San Bernardino Shooters Discussed Martyrdom, Feds Say

A couple who massacred 14 people at a California holiday party were discussing martyrdom online a year before they met in person and married, FBI Director James Comey said on Wednesday.

Investigators were tracing the radicalization of Syed Rizwan Farook, 28, and Tashfeen Malik, 29, who married in 2014, and evidence mounted that both were interested in Islamist-inspired violence before they became acquainted.

"They were actually radicalized before they started ... dating each other online, and as early as the end of 2013 they were talking to each other about jihad and martyrdom before they became engaged," Comey said at a hearing of the Senate Judiciary Committee.

A U.S. government source said Farook may have been plotting an attack as early as 2011. This diminishes the likelihood of early theories after the Dec. 2 shootings in California that Malik had radicalized her husband. Twenty-one people were also wounded in the attack.

Comey said it would be "very, very important to know" if their marriage had been arranged by a militant group as a way to carry out attacks in the United States, although he said there was no evidence yet indicating that.

The investigation of Farook, who was born in Illinois to Pakistani immigrants, and Malik, who was born in Pakistan and lived most of her life in Saudi Arabia, is looking into his relationship with his boyhood friend Enrique Marquez.

According to media reports, Marquez had converted to Islam a few years ago and was connected to Farook's family by

marriage.

A government source said Farook may have planned an attack in 2011 or 2012 but did not follow through.

The source gave no details, but CNN cited two U.S. officials as saying Farook and an unnamed second person selected a target but abandoned their plan after terror-related arrests in the area. Fox News reported Marquez told investigators about the aborted plot.

The San Bernardino Sun newspaper quoted investigation sources as saying multiple photographs of Carter High School in Rialto, California were found on Farook's phone.

Weapons Purchase

The FBI said that in 2011 or 2012 Marquez legally bought the AR-15 assault-style rifles that Farook and Malik used in their attack on the San Bernardino party. A government source familiar with the investigation said authorities were trying to determine if Farook had asked Marquez to buy the weapons so as not to draw attention to himself.

Marquez, who worked at a Walmart Supercenter in Corona, California, has not been arrested in the case, but he was questioned by the FBI on Tuesday and his family home was raided over the weekend.

Marquez checked himself into a Los Angeles-area psychiatric facility soon after the shooting.

State documents showed that last year Marquez married Mariya Chernykh, whose sister is married to Farook's brother, Syed Raheel Farook, a U.S. Navy veteran.

It could not be immediately determined if Marquez lived with his wife. *The New York Times* reported that he split his time between his family's home and that of a girlfriend. Gasser Shehati, a friend of Farook's from a San Bernardino mosque,

said Farook told him several years ago that Marquez had converted to Islam.

On his marriage certificate, Marquez and his wife listed their religious society/denomination as Islamic Society of Corona/Norco.

In a Facebook posting before the attack, Malik pledged loyalty to Islamic State, the militant group that has taken over parts of Iraq and Syria. Coupled with Islamic State attacks in Paris in November that killed 130 people, the San Bernardino assault has elevated concerns about security and immigration in the United States.

Visa Question

Republican members of the Senate Judiciary Committee grilled Comey about the attack and criticized the Obama administration's response to the militant group Islamic State. If the San Bernardino shooters are proven to have been inspired by Islamic militants, theirs would be the largest such attack on U.S. soil since Sept. 11, 2001.

The committee's chairman, Republican Senator Charles Grassley, said the San Bernardino shootings had shown Obama to be "spectacularly wrong" about the security of the U.S. visa screening process since Malik arrived in the United States on a K-1 fiancée visa on which he said she listed a false address.

"Our government apparently didn't catch the false address in Pakistan that she listed on her application," Grassley said.

Comey said in response to a question that he has no reason to believe Islamic State already has cells in the United States.

"They are trying to motivate people already in the United States to become killers on their behalf and they would very much like to—as they aspire to be the leader in the global

jihad—send people here to conduct attacks,” Comey said.

He said the latter scenario “has not been seen yet.” {eoa}

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