



Arizona illustrates how America's domestic counterterrorism operations should work

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On October 10, Arizona Mahin Atif Khan [pleaded guilty](http://www.tucsonlocalmedia.com/news/article_b6733fda-9584-11e6-a843-1f7705adb486.html) (http://www.tucsonlocalmedia.com/news/article_b6733fda-9584-11e6-a843-1f7705adb486.html) "to charges of terrorism, conspiracy to commit terrorism and conspiracy to commit misconduct involving weapons and will soon face at least seven years in prison for his actions." A guilty plea to terrorism isn't usually big news, but Khan's plea should be, as it occurred in state court, rather than federal court.



(<https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/RTX18HVZ-e1476998096877.jpg>)

The site of a terrorism investigation in Phoenix, Arizona May 4, 2015. REUTERS/Nancy Wiechec.

Law enforcement entities had monitored Khan for several months during which he expressed an intent to commit terrorist acts:

While speaking with an individual named as "Abid Manoor," whom Khan believed to be a member of the organization Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan, Khan requested various weapons and plans to make an improvised explosive device. The young man allegedly told Manoor that he was a supporter of ISIL (ISIS), the TTP and was planning to "take out marines and Jews [sic]."

Khan was arrested in the summer, "after a joint investigation by the Phoenix Field Office of the FBI and the Joint Terrorism Task Force with agents from the Arizona Attorney General's Office Special Investigations Section."

As I wrote in March in "[Consolidate Domestic Intelligence Entities Under the FBI](https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Fusion-Center.pdf)" (https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Fusion-Center.pdf), we need a better counterterrorism model for America. The current bifurcated system includes both FBI-led JTTFs and DHS-funded fusion centers operating largely independently of each other. Instead, I proposed a system consolidated within the JTTFs.

Consolidating DHS fusion centers into FBI JTTFs would create one space where representatives from federal, state, and local law enforcement could sit together, evaluate leads, share and review intelligence, and develop unified courses of action. An important part of the discussion would be which level of authority makes the most sense to assume leadership and prosecute cases. Even though counterterrorism is thought of as a federal matter, sometimes, local law enforcement possesses greater flexibility and power.

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The Khan case illustrates the potential of this model, as the JTTF housed the discussion where it was decided that Arizona law provided stronger grounds on which to prosecute the suspect. "Unlike federal laws, [Arizona statutes do not require an "overt act"](http://www.coloradoan.com/story/news/local/phoenix/2016/07/19/fbi-agent-arizona-terror-suspect-under-247-surveillance-before-arrest/87299818/) (http://www.coloradoan.com/story/news/local/phoenix/2016/07/19/fbi-agent-arizona-terror-suspect-under-247-surveillance-before-arrest/87299818/) to prove terrorism conspiracy," thereby leading to Khan's arrest before he could act.

Arizona [Attorney General Mark Brnovich echoed this beneficial approach when he stated](http://www.coloradoan.com/story/news/local/phoenix/2016/07/19/fbi-agent-arizona-terror-suspect-under-247-surveillance-before-arrest/87299818/) (http://www.coloradoan.com/story/news/local/phoenix/2016/07/19/fbi-agent-arizona-terror-suspect-under-247-surveillance-before-arrest/87299818/),

If you look at what's happened ... in San Bernardino and then in Orlando (attacks), I think that everyone recognizes that no one can do this alone. Especially in light of the fact that we see these lone-wolf or small terror cells operating in other parts of the world — this is a problem where you're going to need state, local and federal officials working together.

With the [expected increase in terrorist activity](http://www.insidesources.com/terrorism-dark-clouds-are-gathering-on-the-horizon/) (http://www.insidesources.com/terrorism-dark-clouds-are-gathering-on-the-horizon/) over the coming years, reforming our domestic counterterrorism operations to increase cooperation and intelligence activities between federal, state, and local entities is critical.

For more information, you can listen to a [detailed audio discussion on the issue](https://www.aei.org/press/discussing-states-taking-terrorism-cases-mayer-on-npr/) (https://www.aei.org/press/discussing-states-taking-terrorism-cases-mayer-on-npr/) from an interview I did on National Public Radio.

Learn more: [Defeating terrorism requires both local law enforcement and the Muslim community](https://www.aei.org/publication/defeating-terrorism-requires-local-law-enforcement-muslim-community/) (https://www.aei.org/publication/defeating-terrorism-requires-local-law-enforcement-muslim-community/) | [Create Regional Outreach Groups to Establish Connections and Build Trust](#)

(<https://www.aei.org/publication/create-regional-outreach-groups-to-establish-connections-and-build-trust/>) | [Our Ability to Detect and to Stop Lone Wolf and Small Cell Terrorists Will Depend on Enhancing the Role of Local Law Enforcement](https://www.aei.org/publication/our-ability-to-detect-and-to-stop-lone-wolf-and-small-cell-terrorists-will-depend-on-enhancing-the-role-of-local-law-enforcement/)
(<https://www.aei.org/publication/our-ability-to-detect-and-to-stop-lone-wolf-and-small-cell-terrorists-will-depend-on-enhancing-the-role-of-local-law-enforcement/>)

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