

Nation

San Bernardino shooters began plotting attack before their marriage, FBI chief says



By **Richard A. Serrano** · Contact Reporter

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FBI Director James Comey said Wednesday that [Syed Rizwan Farook](#) and his wife, [Tashfeen Malik](#), began scheming to carry out a terrorist attack long before they were engaged and before she moved to the United States on a fiancée visa last year.

Meanwhile, Sen. Charles E. Grassley (R-Iowa) said Malik may have given false information on her visa application.

“These two killers were radicalized for quite a long time,” Comey told the Senate Judiciary Committee on Wednesday regarding the couple behind last week’s San Bernardino shootings that killed 14 people. “Our investigation to date shows that they were radicalized before they started courting or dating each other online, and as early as the end of 2013, were talking to each other about jihad and martyrdom before they became engaged and married and were living in the U.S.”

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Comey added, “We believe they were inspired by foreign organizations. We are working very hard to see if anyone else was involved in assisting, equipping or helping them. And did they have other plans?”

Comey’s announcement about the couple’s past takes the investigation in a new direction, suggesting that Farook, a U.S. citizen, purposely traveled to Saudi Arabia and Pakistan to find a partner to help him carry out the attack.

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He said that according to information collected so far, Malik “was radicalized before she connected with the other killer.”

Asked if the marriage might have been purposely arranged by a foreign terrorist organization to get two

operatives into the U.S. to pull off the attack, Comey said, “I don’t know the answer to that yet.”

If it turns out a terrorist group did send the couple to the U.S. to wage an attack, Comey said that would be a game changer, showing that groups such as Islamic State have found new ways to penetrate this country.

“That would be a very, very important thing to know,” Comey said.

But the FBI director said the couple began communicating online between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia and Pakistan “prior to the rise of” Islamic State two years ago, another indication of how long they had been in touch with each other.

He further revealed that the couple may have tried recently to alter their semiautomatic weapons to make them more deadly.

“There’s an indication they attempted to convert or did convert them successfully,” he said. “I can’t give an answer definitely yet.”

Comey acknowledged that the FBI is facing a widening terrorism investigation. “It’s ongoing, wide-ranging and [a] very complex case,” he said.

Supporting the concerns were new allegations that Malik gave an incorrect address in Pakistan on her K-1 visa application in what investigators say was an attempt to hide her family’s ties to Islamic militant elements in the Punjab area.

“We now know that Ms. Malik, one of the San Bernardino attackers, arrived in the United States on a fiancée visa,” said Grassley, chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee. “This is yet another example of the failure of the screening process for those entering the United States. Our government apparently didn’t catch the false address in Pakistan she listed on her application or other possible signs that she was radicalized or an operative.”

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Two government sources told The Times that Malik apparently used the name of a neighborhood or street near her home in Pakistan.

If Malik did lie on the application form, that act could have raised red flags with U.S. authorities in Saudi Arabia and the United States, and may have been a missed opportunity to stop her from entering the country.

But others who have seen the visa application think that she might have simply used the name of her former neighborhood or street address in Pakistan – either to get around being exposed because of her family ties to militant groups or because she simply was confused about the application form.

Comey said his agents are “still sorting out” whether Islamic State, also known as ISIS or ISIL, directed the San Bernardino attack. But he added that so far the FBI continues to believe the couple self-radicalized. He confirmed previous reports that the couple sent a digital post pledging allegiance to Islamic State.

“It was claimed by the killers, at or about the time of the killings, that they were doing this for ISIL,” Comey said. “And ISIL has embraced them. ... So ISIL’s inspiration may well have been part of this.”

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UPDATES

9:18 a.m.: The article was updated with Comey's comments about the couple being self-radicalized.

8:40 a.m.: The article was updated with details from Comey about how long the couple had communicated and possible efforts to make their weapons more deadly.

8:14 a.m.: This article was updated with more information about Malik's visa application.

7:47 a.m.: This article was updated with additional quotes from the hearing.

This article was originally published at 7:44 a.m.

This article is related to: [Terrorism](#), [FBI](#), [Tashfeen Malik](#), [Islamic State](#), [San Bernardino Terror Attack](#), [Syed Rizwan Farook](#)

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