

More work necessary to wipe out terror on U.S. territory despite newly released strategy

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by Matthew Rusling

WASHINGTON, May 30 (Xinhua) -- Despite a widely welcomed security strategy unveiled Thursday, a UN official has pinpointed that more work needs to be done to figure out why and how militants have become broadly radicalized.

"A lot more work has to be done on finding out about why people are becoming radicalized to the extent to which they become violent," said Richard Barrett, coordinator for the UN al-Qaida/Taliban Monitoring team.

The U.S. security strategy emphasizes countering "homegrown" terrorism, which is loosely defined as acts of terror perpetrated on U.S. soil by individuals born, raised or based in the United States.

The document outlining the strategy emphasizes a range of options other than the use of the military and says the United States seeks to empower communities to counter radicalization.

The strategy comes on the heels of the arrest of Faisal Shahzad, a U.S. citizen of Pakistani origin, who was detained earlier this month in connection with an attempted car bombing in New York City's Times Square. Shahzad was allegedly radicalized while living in the United States.

A rash of similar attacks have been tried over the last several months, such as the alleged plan to blow up New York's subway system by Najibullah Zazi, an Afghan-born man living in Colorado. A Department of Homeland Security memo said radical groups are likely to ramp up attacks against the United States, CNN reported Wednesday.

"Several recent incidences of violent extremists in the United States who are committed to fighting here and abroad have underscored the threat to the United States and our interests posed by individuals radicalized at home," the 2010 National Security Strategy said.

"Our best defenses against this threat are well informed and equipped families, local communities, and institutions. The Federal Government will invest in intelligence to understand this threat and expand community engagement and development programs to empower local communities," said the document.

Christopher A. Preble, director of foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute think-tank, said al-Qaida used to recruit radical Islamists and help channel their feelings into violence. But now the terror group is taking a step back and seeking to radicalize individuals, as pressure on the network has made it increasingly difficult to raise funds,

train and plan attacks.

"The administration is now trying to get to people before they are a target for radicalization," he said.

NO WAR AGAINST ISLAM

Preble said President Barack Obama's security strategy is the administration's attempt to correct the perception that the fight against Islamic militancy is a war against Islam, although it could take a number of years to gauge the strategy's success.

In a speech on Wednesday in which he discussed the new strategy, Obama's top counterterrorism advisor John Brennan said the administration is not at war with Islam and is fighting al-Qaida and its terrorist affiliates.

Critics, however, accused the administration of caving to political correctness. An editorial in Investors Business Daily on Friday cited a 2008 report by the U.S. Central Command's Red Team.

The threat of homegrown militancy, however, remains small in a population of nearly 300 million and a country can't base all its policies simply on the supposition that a threat may exist, Barrett said.

"But clearly it is sensible to do things, which don't make it more likely that people become radicalized."

Still, the United States will face the threat of homegrown terrorism for some years to come, no matter who sits in the White House, he said.

And while the risk of terror attacks on U.S. soil can be mitigated through the right strategy and policies, it is impossible to eliminate it completely, he said. "The important thing is to keep both the threat in proportion and the reaction to it."

Fred Burton, vice president of intelligence at global intelligence company Stratfor, said one reason recent plots have failed is because militants haven't been able to hone their techniques by conducting practice runs.

The Times Square bomb should have worked, but the bomber had no way to practice setting off a car bomb in a crowded, bustling city such as New York, he said.

MOTIVES OF TERROR

Barrett said many people have turned to militancy in part because of their perception that U.S. foreign policies have been aggressively targeting their community rather than the small number of terrorists that may exist among them.

There should be a welcoming of the overall message President Obama is promoting, as the administration is seeking to work within an international framework and utilize a range of options other than the purely military, he said.

Still, the administration, like the rest of the international community, needs to work more toward understanding the myriad causes of radicalization, as each terrorist's story is different, he said.

Some militants' views could be a reaction to the U.S. invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan. But others may cite different reasons, which are often personal and local, for turning to terrorist violence, he said.