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SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

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**ASHCROFT, FORMER ATTORNEY GENERAL, ET AL. v.
IQBAL ET AL.****CERTIORARI TO THE UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR
THE SECOND CIRCUIT**

No. 07–1015. Argued December 10, 2008—Decided May 18, 2009

Following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, respondent Iqbal, a Pakistani Muslim, was arrested on criminal charges and detained by federal officials under restrictive conditions. Iqbal filed a *Bivens* action against numerous federal officials, including petitioner Ashcroft, the former Attorney General, and petitioner Mueller, the Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). See *Bivens v. Six Unknown Fed. Narcotics Agents*, 403 U. S. 388. The complaint alleged, *inter alia*, that petitioners designated Iqbal a person “of high interest” on account of his race, religion, or national origin, in contravention of the First and Fifth Amendments; that the FBI, under Mueller’s direction, arrested and detained thousands of Arab Muslim men as part of its September-11th investigation; that petitioners knew of, condoned, and willfully and maliciously agreed to subject Iqbal to harsh conditions of confinement as a matter of policy, solely on account of the prohibited factors and for no legitimate penological interest; and that Ashcroft was the policy’s “principal architect” and Mueller was “instrumental” in its adoption and execution. After the District Court denied petitioners’ motion to dismiss on qualified-immunity grounds, they invoked the collateral order doctrine to file an interlocutory appeal in the Second Circuit. Affirming, that court assumed without discussion that it had jurisdiction and focused on the standard set forth in *Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U. S. 544, for evaluating whether a complaint is sufficient to survive a motion to dismiss. Concluding that *Twombly*’s “flexible plausibility standard” obliging a pleader to amplify a claim with factual allegations where necessary to render it plausible was inapplicable in the context of petitioners’ appeal, the court held that Iqbal’s complaint

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was adequate to allege petitioners' personal involvement in discriminatory decisions which, if true, violated clearly established constitutional law.

Held:

1. The Second Circuit had subject-matter jurisdiction to affirm the District Court's order denying petitioners' motion to dismiss. Pp. 6–10.

(a) Denial of a qualified-immunity claim can fall within the narrow class of prejudgment orders reviewable under the collateral-order doctrine so long as the order “turns on an issue of law.” *Mitchell v. Forsyth*, 472 U. S. 511, 530. The doctrine's applicability in this context is well established; an order rejecting qualified immunity at the motion-to-dismiss stage is a “final decision” under 28 U. S. C. §1291, which vests courts of appeals with “jurisdiction of appeals from all final decisions of the district courts.” *Behrens v. Pelletier*, 516 U. S. 299, 307. Pp. 7–8.

(b) Under these principles, the Court of Appeals had, and this Court has, jurisdiction over the District Court's order. Because the order turned on an issue of law and rejected the qualified-immunity defense, it was a final decision “subject to immediate appeal.” *Behrens, supra*, at 307. Pp. 8–10.

2. Iqbal's complaint fails to plead sufficient facts to state a claim for purposeful and unlawful discrimination. Pp. 11–23.

(a) This Court assumes, without deciding, that Iqbal's First Amendment claim is actionable in a *Bivens* action, see *Hartman v. Moore*, 547 U. S. 250, 254, n. 2. Because vicarious liability is inapplicable to *Bivens* and §1983 suits, see, e.g., *Monell v. New York City Dept. of Social Servs.*, 436 U. S. 658, 691, the plaintiff in a suit such as the present one must plead that each Government-official defendant, through his own individual actions, has violated the Constitution. Purposeful discrimination requires more than “intent as volition or intent as awareness of consequences”; it involves a decisionmaker's undertaking a course of action “‘because of,’ not merely ‘in spite of,’ [the action's] adverse effects upon an identifiable group.” *Personnel Administrator of Mass. v. Feeney*, 442 U. S. 256, 279. Iqbal must plead sufficient factual matter to show that petitioners adopted and implemented the detention policies at issue not for a neutral, investigative reason, but for the purpose of discriminating on account of race, religion, or national origin. Pp. 11–13.

(b) Under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 8(a)(2), a complaint must contain a “short and plain statement of the claim showing that the pleader is entitled to relief.” “[D]etailed factual allegations” are not required, *Twombly*, 550 U. S., at 555, but the Rule does call for sufficient factual matter, accepted as true, to “state a claim to relief

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that is plausible on its face,” *id.*, at 570. A claim has facial plausibility when the pleaded factual content allows the court to draw the reasonable inference that the defendant is liable for the misconduct alleged. *Id.*, at 556. Two working principles underlie *Twombly*. First, the tenet that a court must accept a complaint’s allegations as true is inapplicable to threadbare recitals of a cause of action’s elements, supported by mere conclusory statements. *Id.*, at 555. Second, determining whether a complaint states a plausible claim is context-specific, requiring the reviewing court to draw on its experience and common sense. *Id.*, at 556. A court considering a motion to dismiss may begin by identifying allegations that, because they are mere conclusions, are not entitled to the assumption of truth. While legal conclusions can provide the complaint’s framework, they must be supported by factual allegations. When there are well-pleaded factual allegations, a court should assume their veracity and then determine whether they plausibly give rise to an entitlement to relief. Pp. 13–16.

(c) Iqbal’s pleadings do not comply with Rule 8 under *Twombly*. Several of his allegations—that petitioners agreed to subject him to harsh conditions as a matter of policy, solely on account of discriminatory factors and for no legitimate penological interest; that Ashcroft was that policy’s “principal architect”; and that Mueller was “instrumental” in its adoption and execution—are conclusory and not entitled to be assumed true. Moreover, the factual allegations that the FBI, under Mueller, arrested and detained thousands of Arab Muslim men, and that he and Ashcroft approved the detention policy, do not plausibly suggest that petitioners purposefully discriminated on prohibited grounds. Given that the September 11 attacks were perpetrated by Arab Muslims, it is not surprising that a legitimate policy directing law enforcement to arrest and detain individuals because of their suspected link to the attacks would produce a disparate, incidental impact on Arab Muslims, even though the policy’s purpose was to target neither Arabs nor Muslims. Even if the complaint’s well-pleaded facts gave rise to a plausible inference that Iqbal’s arrest was the result of unconstitutional discrimination, that inference alone would not entitle him to relief: His claims against petitioners rest solely on their ostensible policy of holding detainees categorized as “of high interest,” but the complaint does not contain facts plausibly showing that their policy was based on discriminatory factors. Pp. 16–20.

(d) Three of Iqbal’s arguments are rejected. Pp. 20–23.

(i) His claim that *Twombly* should be limited to its antitrust context is not supported by that case or the Federal Rules. Because *Twombly* interpreted and applied Rule 8, which in turn governs the

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pleading standard “in all civil actions,” Rule 1, the case applies to antitrust and discrimination suits alike, see 550 U. S., at 555–556, and n. 14. P. 20.

(ii) Rule 8’s pleading requirements need not be relaxed based on the Second Circuit’s instruction that the District Court cabin discovery to preserve petitioners’ qualified-immunity defense in anticipation of a summary judgment motion. The question presented by a motion to dismiss for insufficient pleadings does not turn on the controls placed on the discovery process. *Twombly, supra*, at 559. And because Iqbal’s complaint is deficient under Rule 8, he is not entitled to discovery, cabined or otherwise. Pp. 20–22.

(iii) Rule 9(b)—which requires particularity when pleading “fraud or mistake” but allows “other conditions of a person’s mind [to] be alleged generally”—does not require courts to credit a complaint’s conclusory statements without reference to its factual context. Rule 9 merely excuses a party from pleading discriminatory intent under an elevated pleading standard. It does not give him license to evade Rule 8’s less rigid, though still operative, strictures. Pp. 22–23.

(e) The Second Circuit should decide in the first instance whether to remand to the District Court to allow Iqbal to seek leave to amend his deficient complaint. P. 23.

490 F. 3d 143, reversed and remanded.

KENNEDY, J., delivered the opinion of the Court, in which ROBERTS, C. J., and SCALIA, THOMAS, and ALITO, JJ., joined. SOUTER, J., filed a dissenting opinion, in which STEVENS, GINSBURG, and BREYER, JJ., joined. BREYER, J., filed a dissenting opinion.