

You are here

Home » Media Center » Press Releases



King Opens Committee on Homeland Security Hearing on Radicalization

Media Contact: Shane Wolfe (202) 226-8417

Mar 10, 2011

Washington, D.C. (Thursday, March 10, 2011) – The prepared opening statement of U.S. Rep. Peter T. King (R-NY), Chairman of the Committee on Homeland Security, for the hearing entitled “The Extent of Radicalization in the American Muslim Community and that Community's Response” follows: “Today's hearing will be the first in a series of hearings dealing with the critical issue of the radicalization of Muslim-Americans.

I am well aware that the announcement of these hearings has generated considerable controversy and opposition. Some of this opposition -- such as from my colleague and friend Mr. Ellison has been measured and thoughtful. Other opposition - both from special interest groups and the media has ranged from disbelief to paroxysms of rage and hysteria.

Let me make it clear today that I remain convinced that these hearings must go forward. And they will. To back down would be a craven surrender to political correctness and an abdication of what I believe to be the main responsibility of this committee-- to protect America from a terrorist attack.

Despite what passes for conventional wisdom in certain circles, there is nothing radical or un-American in holding these hearings. Indeed, Congressional investigation of Muslim American radicalization is the logical response to the repeated and urgent warnings which the Obama Administration has been making in recent months.

Just this past Sunday, for instance, Denis McDonough, the Deputy National Security Advisor to President Obama, made a major speech on radicalization stating that:

"al Qaeda and its adherents have increasingly turned to another troubling tactic: attempting to recruit and radicalize people to terrorism here in the United States."

"For a long time, many in the U.S. thought that we were immune from this threat. That was false hope, and false comfort. This threat is real, and it is serious.

"(Al Qaeda does this) for the expressed purpose of trying to convince Muslim Americans to reject their country and attack their fellow Americans. Similarly in late December, Attorney General Holder said the growing number of young Americans being radicalized and willing to take up arms against our country "keeps him awake at night."

And two weeks before that the Attorney General defended the FBI's sting operation against Mohammad Osman Mohammad who attempted a terror attack during a Christmas tree lighting celebration in Portland, Oregon saying he made "no apologies" for this operation.

"Those who characterize the FBI's activities as entrapment simply do not have their facts straight."

One month ago Secretary Napolitano testified before this Committee and said that the threat level today is as high as it has been since September 11th because of increased radicalization in our country.

This Committee cannot live in denial which is what some would have us do when they suggest that this hearing dilute its focus by investigating threats unrelated to Al Qaeda. The Department of Homeland Security and this committee were formed in response to the al Qaeda attacks of 9/11. There is no equivalency of threat between al Qaeda and neo-Nazis, environmental extremists or other isolated madmen. Only al Qaeda and its Islamist affiliates in this country are part of an international threat to our nation. Indeed by the Justice Department's own record not one terror related case in the last two years involved neo-Nazis, environmental extremists, militias or anti-war groups.

I have repeatedly said the overwhelming majority of Muslim-Americans are outstanding Americans and make enormous contributions to our country. But there are realities we cannot ignore. For instance a Pew Poll said that 15% of Muslim-American men between the age of 18 and 29 could support suicide bombings. This is the segment of the community al Qaeda is attempting to recruit.

To combat this threat, moderate leadership must emerge from the Muslim community. As the Majority and Minority staff of the Senate Homeland Security Committee concluded in its report on "Violent Islamist Extremism and the Homegrown Terrorist Threat", "Muslim community leaders (and) religious leaders must play a more visible role in discrediting and providing alternatives to violent Islamist ideology."

This means that responsible Muslim-American leaders must reject discredited groups such as CAIR - The Council on Islamic-American Relations which was named as an unindicted co-conspirator in the terrorist financing case involving the Holyland Foundation. In the leadup to this hearing I found it shocking and sad that the mainstream media accepted CAIR's accusations as if it were a legitimate organization. Thankfully, FBI Director Mueller has ordered the FBI to cease all dealings and contact with CAIR. I would hope that all law enforcement officials would follow the lead of the FBI Director.

Al Qaeda realizes that the measures we have put in place over the past 9 ½ years make it very difficult to launch a large scale attack against the homeland from outside the country which is why they have altered their strategy and are recruiting and using people living legally in the United States. These include:

Let me thank all of the witnesses for giving of their valuable time to be with us today. I want to express special thanks, however, to Melvin Bledsoe and Abdirizak Bihi. These brave men have endured suffering no father or uncle should ever have to go through. Their courage and spirit will put a human face on the horror which Islamist radicalization has inflicted and will continue to inflict on good families, especially those in the Muslim community, unless we put aside political correctness and define who our enemy truly is.

As we approach the 10-year anniversary of the September 11th attacks, we cannot allow the memories of that tragic day to fade away. We must remember that in the days immediately following the attack, we are all united in our dedication to fight back against Al Qaeda and its ideology.

Today, we must be fully aware that homegrown radicalization is part of al Qaeda's strategy to continue attacking the United States. Al Qaeda is actively targeting the American Muslim Community for recruitment. Today's hearing will address this dangerous trend."

###