

Written Testimony of

SIREEN SAWAF
GOVERNMENT RELATIONS DIRECTOR, SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
MUSLIM PUBLIC AFFAIRS COUNCIL

"Radicalization, Information Sharing and Community Outreach: Protecting the Homeland
from Homegrown Terror"

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Chairwoman Harman and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. It is a privilege to testify before you today on behalf of the Muslim Public Affairs Council to discuss the phenomenon of radicalization and some of the work the Muslim American community has done alongside law enforcement to counter this threat and enhance our nations security.

First and foremost, radicalization must be seen as a socio-political set of behaviors and is not simply a law enforcement problem. If not understood, mishandled, or even exacerbated, the emotions and political persuasions of the people we are trying to help, in this case Muslim American youth, will be further alienated and marginalized from the mainstream, and hence a sense of ghettoization will take place in various communities. We cannot afford to continue with language that imposes suspicion on Muslim American youth, whereby they are guilty before proven innocent, and then spend millions of dollars on studies and programs to engage them. The key to countering extremism and radicalization, therefore, is understanding and partnering with the Muslim American community, as we are one of the most underutilized but irreplaceable assets in protecting the homeland. When extremists use Islam to justify acts of terrorism, the only group that can counter bad theology with accurate theology is the Muslim American leadership. We are best equipped to detect criminal activity and distinguish it from cultural norms (such as prayer in airport terminals), and we are most qualified to win the hearts and minds of the Muslim world. It takes leadership and insight to recognize the critical role American Muslims play in protecting this country; hence I commend this Subcommittee for

including our much-needed perspective in this solution-seeking effort.

It is important to note that one of the key factors in preventing another 9/11 from happening is the patriotism of the Muslim American community in openly rejecting al-Qaeda as a legitimate group within Islamic discourse. Through counter-terrorism policy papers and public pronouncements against terrorism, such as the Fatwa (legal opinion) of Muslim American scholars, Muslim Americans have separated legitimate Islamic discourse and activity from violent radicalism using religion as a vehicle for mobilization. We recommend that policy-makers and opinion-shapers should apply the same practice. Otherwise, we afford al-Qaeda the only source of legitimacy, the veneer of Islam.

As we collectively strive to analyze the reality and possibility of "homegrown terrorism" in the West, the bombings in London, Madrid and the recently foiled plots in Canada have fueled public anxiety and the concerns of public officials. In order to effectively counter homegrown terrorism in the U.S., particularly the potential for radicalization of Muslim youth, it is necessary to understand the roots of that extremism and the key factors that may cause one to cross the line from rhetoric to violence.

The Muslim Public Affairs Council has just completed the first substantive American Muslim position paper addressing radicalization that contributes to preventing this phenomenon from taking root in U.S. soil by 1) framing the issues related to the radicalization of Muslim youth in the West while considering the realities on the ground, and 2) providing recommendations to Muslim American institutions, government and the media to engage young Muslims in a healthy partnership of respect and equality and subsequently reduce the possibility of radicalization by enhancing integration. For the purpose of today's hearing, I will highlight key parts of this paper entitled, "Effectively Countering Extremism and Supporting Muslim American Youth." The Muslim Public Affairs Council is offering an opportunity to all staff and members of this distinguished committee a briefing on this Muslim Youth paper in Washington, DC, at a time of your convenience.

Radicalization and Key Factors

The radicalization of young Western Muslims, while on the minds of many, is void of thoughtful analyses that explain core dynamics within Western societies and how they uniquely affect youth within extremely diverse Muslim communities. Only when we delve into the key issues of identity, social and political alienation, the definition of a moderate, and Islamophobia as a root cause of radicalization can we understand and prevent radicalization from taking root in the U.S.

First and foremost, when defining radicalization, government agencies across the board must articulate a clear distinction between healthy challenging of the status quo in current affairs with the expression of radical rhetoric, and the willingness to use, support or facilitate violence as a means for change. Until today, the public officials striving to understand and prevent violence have yet to effectively articulate this distinction to the

public, particularly the Muslim American community, which has increased the gap of community distrust and suspicion of government officials.

Moreover, when law enforcement or anti-academic freedom groups (e.g. Campus Watch) engage in what some have called "thought policing", many young Muslim Americans feel alienated. To criticize the lack of free expression in the Muslim world while discouraging the same in the U.S. is perceived to be hypocritical or at least incongruent. As a result Muslim American youth can end up resisting or distrusting mainstream political and civic participation leaving them vulnerable to fringe radical groups.

Identity

We at MPAC believe that an accurate evaluation of the state of the Muslim American community must be built upon an assessment of the health and vibrancy of the Muslim American Identity. Since the early 1980's, MPAC and its affiliate institutions have focused resources and efforts on building a community of Muslims in America that are forward-looking and contributing components of American pluralism. This and similar Muslim American experiences across the nation aim to build communities that are organic to the global community of Muslims and also at "home" in the American project.

A recent Gallup poll discussed in our position paper on youth that accounted statistically for the opinions of 1 billion Muslims and their opinions of the West presented data challenging those who argue a "clash of civilizations" analysis to explain present concerns around extremism and terrorism. The study's findings further challenge the notion that religiosity and radicalism are two sides of the same coin of terrorism. The inability to realize that religion is an answer to radicalization, that only a good and authentic theology can overcome a zealous and fraudulent one, has led us down a slippery slope of conflating religious conservatism for radicalism or extremism.

While rejecting the simplistic "clash of civilizations" theory, as realities on the ground including the adoption of the Muslim American Identity have proven false, it is important to recognize the sense of marginalization many youth feel and the importance of reaffirming the contributory role Muslim American youth play in our nations pluralism.

Social and Political Alienation

It is important to note that the factors that increase the wedge of identity, such as alienation and marginalization of Muslims, vary in the United States and in Europe. MPAC's position paper on youth brings to light the different factors contributing to the more successful integration of Muslim Americans into American pluralism, such as the demographic and structural differences between the U.S. and Europe.

As of today, we have not seen a terrorist group forming amongst youth here in the U.S. In fact, the Muslim American community at large has rejected any militancy within the mainstream community and there is no indication that any Al-Qaeda-like movement has gained traction in America.

In recent decades, however, some Muslim groups drew young people into communities that attempted to live self-sufficiently from the broader society surrounding them with the intent of living a Puritan life. Throughout the course of American history, the idea of "separating" as a race or a religion from the larger society has been viewed repeatedly as an option for the disenfranchised or a desire by immigrant communities to maintain ones identity. It is important to emphasize that in the U.S. experience, none of these social manifestations represented a terrorist threat but were an expression of marginalization, even frustration with current foreign and domestic policies of the U.S. government.

Moderates vs. Extremists

Much of the global conversation about Islam and Muslims is focused on labeling the different camps of Muslims from a perspective completely out of touch with the realities on the ground. Since our inception in 1988, MPAC has proposed that moderation, particularly of Muslims, cannot be gauged by the political ideas and ideologies that one holds, but rather by ones understanding of moderation as defined by the Qur'an and the tradition of the Prophet. If acquiescence to or active support of American global interest were the test, then characters such as Saddam Hussein and Usama bin Laden would each have qualified at different junctures in their careers.

MPAC's position paper details the distinction between a moderate and a radical, the problems that arise when we invoke rhetoric and terminology, such as Islamic Radicalization, and the key to marginalizing the extremists. Suffice it to say, the litmus tests for moderation, rather, revolve around topics such as the role of women in the public square and in leadership roles within Muslim institutions, the impermissibility of the use of violence as a means for political change, the acceptance of disparate segments of the Muslim American community, the rights of non-Muslims in Muslim-majority societies and the role of critical thinking in building the character of a Muslim. When it comes to the topic of reform, it is the sole role of Muslim Americans to lead this discourse within arenas of authentic and well-grounded sources of Islam.

Islamophobia: A Root Cause of Radicalization

We at MPAC have consistently argued through publications such as our Counterproductive Counterterrorism policy paper and other avenues that much of the hate disguised in counterterrorism is counterproductive, and the anti-Islamic rhetoric will eventually result in impeding our national security and ability to defend the homeland.

Too frequently, communities that are excluded from conversations tend to use that exclusion as an excuse to withdraw from any discussion on religious reform and civic engagement. Since the 1980's, MPAC has advocated for civic and political engagement as the key tools for the inclusion of Muslim Americans and the consequent prevention of extremism. Our position paper on youth lists recommendations for Universities, American Muslim institutions, the media, and government to quell the potential for radicalization in the U.S. Here, it is important to highlight some of the relationships

MPAC has built with government officials, particularly law enforcement.

Muslim Community-Law Enforcement Relations

MPAC has been heavily involved in counter-terrorism and outreach efforts in cooperation with national and local law enforcement agencies as well as the equally important efforts of counter-extremism in the Muslim American community with a focus on youth. We have also been engaged with European Muslim communities and governments in numerous arenas on both sides of the Atlantic as well as in Muslim-majority countries in an effort to assess the environments that produce such extremism. Recognizing the importance of engaging young people in planning for the future as a central theme to constructive religious, social and political work, MPAC is committed to building a future generation of leaders.

Since the early 1990's, MPAC has worked closely with federal agencies such as the FBI, and has contributed to enhancing our nations security by providing analysis and a unique perspective through direct communication with key officials and thoughtful mediums, such as MPAC's 1999 Counterterrorism Policy Paper. Following 911, many of these relationships have become institutionalized and formalized to some degree, and have expanded to include leadership from other 911-impacted communities on the local and national levels. MPAC currently participates in regular meetings with state and local law enforcement, and on a local and national level, the Department of Homeland Security and the Federal Bureau of Investigations. The partnership model in Los Angeles I wish to elaborate on is the FBI-initiated Multi-Cultural Advisory Committee (MCAC).

As the Government Relations Director of Southern California for the Muslim Public Affairs Council, it is my responsibility to enhance civic engagement amongst the Muslim American community and to ensure that the concerns of the community are being addressed by the appropriate government agencies responsible for those concerns, which is what lead to my participation in MCAC since it's inception.

I must start by commending the FBI for being among the first government agencies to recognize the importance of engaging with and outreaching to the community following the horrific attacks of 911. In response to the increasing concerns of American Muslim, Arab, Sikh, South Asian, Coptic Christian, Bahai and Iranian communities in the post-911 era, the FBI initiated the creation of the Multi-Cultural Advisory Committee in 2004. MCAC's mission of creating "an environment to facilitate dialogue and enhance the relationship between the FBI and the Community, which is based upon mutual respect, understanding, and the protection of Constitutional rights and civil liberties" is necessary in ensuring communities become part of the solution. Creating and strengthening a two-way line of communication with the government has provided the opportunity for community leaders to raise concerns about policies and procedures and regain confidence in the government when concerns are resolved given their due attention, encouraging the use of community expertise towards problem-solving.

While most of what I will share will apply to other communities, I will be addressing the

concerns of the Muslim American community. Upon its inception, establishing a strong relationship with the FBI and the grassroots Muslim American community was burdened with external factors such as cultural baggage, particularly cultural distrust due to previous experiences within the indigenous African American Muslim community, and suspicion of law enforcement by first and second-generation Muslims due to experiences in ones country of origin, where police were an extension of an oppressive regime. Muslim leadership and the FBI have continued to jointly craft solutions to these challenges such as providing constructive feedback on watch lists for the purpose of enhancing efficacy and avoiding wrongful inclusion of innocent people; increasing direct communication between the FBI and community members to ensure the sharing of accurate information and citizens have direct access to their public servants; and providing cultural sensitivity trainings to law enforcement designed to increase sensitivity toward the community. These efforts have been successful in breaking down the communication barrier, and they must continue, as the road ahead is a long one.

Unfortunately, several internal factors have and continue to inhibit the relationship to some degree, much of which are due to the bureaucracy in the FBI rather than the lack of desire for engagement by the community. The names of innocent citizens landing on watchlists, controversy around high profile cases, the use of informants, the use of foreign intelligence in the prosecution of domestic cases, and the conflation of every criminal activity by Muslims that makes it's way to public media as terrorism are just a few issues that drive a wedge between the FBI and the Muslim American community. The perception of the community has become one where they believe they are viewed as suspect rather than partner in the War on Terror, and that their civil liberties are "justifiably" sacrificed upon the decisions of federal agents. So the task of building the level of communication, trust and confidence with the Muslim American community has become much more challenging. It is the responsibility of the FBI to provide clarity in the midst of confusion, and of the community to ensure accurate information surpasses the rumors that can cause fear and alienation. Here, I'd like to highlight an example of a success.

Following a series of politically controversial events held by Muslim students at the University of California, Irvine, Pat Rose, the head of the FBI's Orange County al-Qaida squad was quoted as saying her agency was looking for and electronically monitoring potential terrorists in Orange County. Rose also said that the FBI is aware of large numbers of Muslims at UCI and USC, and was "quite surprised" that "there are a lot of individuals of interest right here in Orange County." The publication and timing of this quote caused an uproar in Muslim youth and the Orange County Muslim community, as they understood these comments to suggest that the FBI was monitoring student groups, possibly due to organizing unpopular but nevertheless legal political events on campus. In efforts to nip this rumor in the bud, FBI Assistant Director in Charge of the Los Angeles field office, Stephen Tidwell, clarified these remarks at an emergency town hall meeting of youth, parents and other community members in Irvine in June 2006, and in a written statement in July 2006. While some were skeptical of Tidwell's clarification, this swift response by the FBI should serve as an example to the importance of disseminating accurate information about FBI operations and answering to the legitimate grievances of

community members.

Many challenges remain ahead, and despite the deficiencies in partnerships that currently exist, the MCAC model is an example of how to create and maintain partnership, understanding, information sharing, and bridge building between government officials and community members. The responsibility to maintain a successful partnership falls on both parties. For instance, government public pronouncements about criminal activity should avoid the conflated use of terrorism terminology that implicates Islam and motivations sourced in Muslim culture and Islamic tradition. Moreover, when cases that are championed as terrorism-related are resolved with no relation to issues related to Islam or the American Muslim community, law enforcement should clearly and loudly inform the public. In tandem, community members should continue to engage their public officials, and ensure decision-makers and public servants are addressing their concerns, while we continue to collectively think of innovative ways to participate in the protection of the country and the principles upon which it was founded. Tensions that will challenge the partnership will certainly arise, but we must patiently persevere to create and maintain positive, constructive relations as we find each other on the frontlines of protecting this nation. Sincere partnership based on accurate and responsible communication sharing, the recognition of the critical role the community plays in enhancing our nations security, and collective problem solving is a key tool in preventing radicalization from taking root in our soil. I thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and I welcome your questions.