



United States Senate
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
Chairman Joseph I. Lieberman, ID-Conn.

Opening Statement of Chairman Joseph Lieberman
Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee Hearing
“Violent Islamist Extremism: The European Experience.”
Washington, DC
June 27, 2007

Good morning and welcome to this fourth hearing in the Homeland Security Committee’s ongoing important investigation of Islamic radicalization within the United States.

The goals of these hearings are four in number:

One: To determine the extent of Islamist radicalization within the United States.

Two: To learn how and why radicalization occurs.

Three: To ask what can be done to counter the extremist message that incites its recruits to violence.

And four: To determine whether our government is doing everything it can to prevent Islamist extremists from carrying out violent attacks against us from within our country.

With today’s hearing – “Violent Islamist Extremism: The European Experience” – we look across the Atlantic Ocean for advice and guidance from those on the front-lines of the battle against terrorism in Europe, as well as those who have studied it there and here in the United States.

We will also be hearing from the co-authors of a new report on the integration of Muslims into American society who will compare and contrast their findings about the Muslim-American community with communities in Europe.

Let me welcome our witnesses and thank them for taking the time to join with us today to offer their testimony and answer our questions.

Judge Jean Louis Bruguière, France’s lead magistrate for counter-terrorism;

Lidewijde Ongering, Deputy National Coordinator for Counterterrorism in the Netherlands;

Dr. Marc Sageman, leading researcher on global Islamist extremism;

Mr. Farooq Kathwari, Co-Chair of the Task Force on Muslim American Civic and Political Engagement and CEO of Ethan Allan Interiors;

and Ms. Lynn Martin, the other Co-Chair of Task Force on Muslim American Civic and Political Engagement and former Secretary of Labor.

We look to Europe today because European nations have experienced, over the last several years, a sharp growth in “homegrown” terrorism – terrorism that while inspired by the same ideology that fuels the atrocities of Al Qaeda, has been perpetrated by individuals born and raised within Europe.

Research shows that, overall, European populations have been more susceptible to Islamist radicalization than those in the United States.

The bombing attacks in London and riots in France in 2005, the killing of Theo Van Gogh in the Netherlands and the Madrid train bombings in 2004 – either carried out exclusively or aided in part by homegrown terrorists – seem to bear that out.

Many other Islamist terrorist plots have been disrupted across Western Europe thanks to aggressive law enforcement and intelligence, including the extraordinary attempt to blow up airliners en route to the U.S. from London last summer, which, thankfully, was stopped.

We look to Europe because of the decisive steps that governments have taken to address these threats.

Just as we created the Department of Homeland Security in the wake of September 11, European governments have altered their structures, policies, and procedures to adapt to the new threat.

We hope to learn from their experiences and successes.

But the United States cannot ignore the warning signs within our own nation.

Homegrown Islamist extremists have recently been accused of forming plans to attack in Fort Dix, New Jersey, and in a separate case, set ablaze the underground aviation fuel lines that feed JFK Airport in New York.

These are just the most recent examples. Since 9-11, a significant number of terrorist plots have been thwarted by law enforcement working with our allies throughout the world, particularly in Europe.

The recent Pew Center Report on Muslims in America gives us reason to be concerned about the threat of Islamic radicalization in the United States.

That poll showed that among Muslims in America between the ages of 18 and 29, 26 percent said there were times that suicide bombings may be justified.

A shocking 5 percent of U.S. Muslim adults 18 and over had a favorable opinion of al Qaeda, another 16 percent had a “somewhat” unfavorable view and a puzzling 27 percent had no opinion.

These numbers are profoundly troubling. If the Pew estimates are correct, and there are roughly 1.5 million Muslims age 18 and older in the U.S., having 5 percent looking at al Qaeda favorably means there is a sizeable pool of Muslims who either are susceptible to al Qaeda’s propaganda and plans or already believe it.

9-11 showed us it takes only a handful of committed terrorists – in that case just 19 – to carry out a devastating attack.

And the recent arrests of the alleged Fort Dix and JFK plotters shows that thanks to modern media, like the internet, these homegrown terrorists do not need to meet with an al Qaeda operative or journey to a terrorist training camp to plan attacks against Americans from America.

They can now become fully radicalized on virtual networks by just sitting at their computers.

That’s why it is important, as I said in the beginning, to understand how people become radicalized so we can counter that process before it turns into action.

It is not a time to panic or divide. It is rather a time to unite and defend the freedoms we cherish here in the U.S.

I look forward to hearing our panel’s thoughts on these questions and, again, I thank you for joining us today.

Senator Collins.