

Statement of  
Senator Susan M. Collins

"Violent Islamist Extremism: The European Experience "

Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs  
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**Americans have no monopoly as targets of violent extremists. We are not alone in our determination to defeat terrorism and to protect innocent lives. Many of our European allies have also felt the lash of hatred and murder.**

**The bombings in London and Madrid and the violent protests in the Netherlands demonstrated that violent extremism has many targets in addition to Americans. Like the six men arrested last month in the Fort Dix case, those charged with the bombings in London and Madrid were home-grown**

**terrorists. They were living and working in the countries whose people they chose to attack.**

**In Europe, as in America, the main focus of the battle against violent extremists is that small but deadly group of terrorists who invoke a warped vision of Islam as their guide and justification. In Europe, as in America, violent extremists include both non-citizens and native-born; both the self-radicalized and those won over by outside messages; both the lone wolf and the group member.**

**Today's hearing gives us an invaluable opportunity to learn from the experience of others. Europe's large Muslim immigrant populations, its proximity to Muslim countries in North Africa and the Middle East, and its demographic trends give its governments at least as much incentive as America**

**has to understand the sources and targets of violent radicalization and to take effective action to counter the threat.**

**What I have already learned has reinforced my belief that there is no universal solvent to wipe away the stain of violent extremism. Police work, border security, and intelligence gathering are certainly part of the mix, but as the office of the Netherlands Coordinator for Counterterrorism recently observed, “Polarization, inter-ethnic violence, and xenophobia remain causes of concerns,” because they can increase the sense of rejection and alienation among Muslim communities.**

**As the French experience with riots by young Muslims from housing projects suggests, unemployment and poor prospects for integration**

into the economic life of a country may also foster grievances that feed the radicalization process. And as research among actual violent jihadists reveals, ties of kinship, friendship, and community can play a role in drawing isolated or aggrieved young people into the ranks of extremists.

The work of the Chicago Council on Global Affairs task force will also prove useful as this Committee continues its work. Among its many points, the task force makes the important observation that some people's belief that Islam is incompatible with American values may simultaneously promote exclusionary attitudes in the larger population while undermining Muslims' receptivity to our efforts to engage them.

**I hope the Chicago Council witnesses may be able to draw distinctions between European and American society that will help us understand and address the factors that radicalize Muslim citizens and residents to violent extremism. In particular, I am interested to hear if our witnesses believe whether factors that have led to recent violent activity in Europe are also present in the United States. I also look forward to hearing what we can do proactively to prevent a similar cycle of radicalization in the United States.**

**All of these considerations are important as we seek ways to combat violent extremism directly and to curb its growth by improving outreach efforts to our Muslim neighbors, and by promoting the inclusion of all resident Muslims in the peaceful and tolerant fabric of American life.**

**I join you, Mr. Chairman, in welcoming today's witnesses. Their testimony and comments will be valuable additions to our understanding of the threat we are all trying to counter.**

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