



Committee on Homeland Security
Fact Sheet Prepared by the Majority Staff:

Understanding H.R. 1955: The Violent Radicalization and Homegrown Terrorism Prevention Act of 2007



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
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Statement of Introduction

The bipartisan Violent Radicalization and Homegrown Terrorism Prevention Act of 2007 passed the House by a vote of 404-6. The bill received overwhelming support because it is a common sense approach to studying the unique threats of violent radicalization and homegrown terrorism in the United States. At every stage of development of the bill, feedback and guidance were sought, received, and incorporated from prominent privacy and civil liberties groups to ensure that the bill is consistent with the constitutional protections that we all hold dear.

The purpose of H.R. 1955 is to *study* violent radicalization and homegrown terrorism using a method that has worked in the past: the establishment of a National Commission. This approach worked prior to September 11, 2001 with the National Commission on Terrorism, which set the stage for America's counterterrorism strategy prior the September 11 attacks. It worked again with the National Commission on the Terrorists Attacks upon the United States, which in the wake of the attacks made recommendations that strengthened and solidified our current approach to fighting terrorism both domestically and abroad. This new Commission will follow their example and serve our country by providing answers to the indigenous threat of violent radicalization and homegrown terrorism.

The Commissioners will not be appointed solely by the President. Rather, the leadership of both parties, in addition to the Chairs and Ranking Members of the relevant House and Senate Committees will select individuals from a broad array of disciplines, including constitutional law. The Commission will be tasked with providing Congress with a series of reports with the Commission's findings and legislative recommendations. *As with the 9/11 Commission and other national commissions, at the end of the day, it is Congress that decides which, if any, changes to the law, should be adopted.* The Commission will be a part of the Legislative branch and will therefore be independent of the Executive branch and its agencies.

This legislation in no way restricts thought or speech. Both of these are legal activities that should be encouraged by all segments of our society and are welcomed in our system of open debate and dialogue. Radical thinking is not a crime and this legislation does not turn radical thinking into criminal behavior.



The Truth about H.R. 1955

This legislation is a vital step toward securing America and mitigating against an American citizen engaging in a terrorist attack on American soil.

H.R. 1955 accomplishes the following:

- It creates a National Commission to examine the causes of violent radicalization and homegrown terrorism and propose concrete recommendations and legislative strategies for mitigating these threats.
- It establishes a Center of Excellence for the Prevention of Radicalization and Home Grown Terrorism that will study the social, criminal, political, psychological and economic roots of violent radicalization and homegrown terrorism and provide homeland security officials across the government with solutions to these threats.
- It requires our homeland security officials to reach out to other nations that have experienced homegrown terrorism in the past to benefit from the lessons learned by those nations.
- It protects the civil rights and civil liberties of Americans to ensure that in our effort to secure our nation from domestic threats, we abide by the rights and safeguards guaranteed by our Constitution.



Myths vs. Facts

Myth: *H.R. 1955 is a “thought crime” bill that attempts to legislate constitutionally-protected speech.*

Fact: H.R. 1955 does **NOT** legislate thought or protected political expression and free speech. There are no provisions seeking to change the criminal code or set up a “Big Brother” regime to put Americans under surveillance.

Myth: *H.R. 1955 criminalizes constitutionally-protected behavior such as political association.*

Fact: H.R. 1955 does **NOT** criminalize behavior. The bill does not create any new crimes, criminal penalties, nor does it encourage the Commission to do so. On the contrary, H.R. 1955 requires the Department of Homeland Security, through its Privacy Office and Office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, to create an auditing mechanism to ensure that any policy stemming from the actions of the Commission will not violate anyone’s rights. The results of this audit will be included in the Commission’s annual report to Congress.

Myth: *H.R. 1955 discriminates against particular races, ethnicities and religions.*

Fact: H.R. 1955 does **NOT** alienate any particular race, ethnicity or religious group. To the contrary, the bill includes a provision that states that “individuals prone to violent radicalization, homegrown terrorism, and ideologically based violence span all races, ethnicities, and religious beliefs, and individuals should not be targeted based solely on race, ethnicity, or religion.”

Myth: *H.R. 1955 will lead to Internet censorship.*

Fact: H.R. 1955 neither targets the Internet nor seeks to censor its usage. The Internet is a robust communications tool that can be used to educate, inspire, challenge, entertain, and stimulate intellectual curiosity and promote awareness and understanding across cultures and national borders. The protection of the Internet from government interference is in our national interest.

Myth: *H.R. 1955 is unnecessary because the threat of violent radicalization and homegrown terrorism does not exist in the United States.*

Fact: While it is true that European countries have experienced violent radicalization and homegrown terrorism at a greater proportion than the United States, we are not immune. The arrests of U.S. citizens who were plotting attacks against the Fort Dix military base in New Jersey and JFK airport in New York earlier this year remind us that the threat in this country is real. And we must never forget that the most deadly act of terrorism perpetrated on American soil prior to September 11, 2001 was committed by American citizen Timothy McVeigh, who was responsible for the death of over 180 people, including small children, in one day. These examples indicate that we need to be ahead of the curve. H.R. 1955 instructs our Government to reach out to other Nations to learn about how they have addressed violent radicalization and homegrown terrorism in their countries. And once again, it protects the liberties of Americans by requiring our Government to evaluate what other countries have done within our own Constitutional framework and system of safeguards and protections.