

Statement of Senator George V. Voinovich
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
Hearing on, "The Internet: A Portal to Violent Extremism"
May 3, 2007

Mr. Chairman, I commend you for holding this series of important hearings examining the threat of Islamist radicalization to our homeland. You have shown courage and leadership in choosing to tackle a complex and divisive issue.

The United States is at war against a transnational terrorist movement fueled by radical extremists. This struggle transcends borders, and the internet has exponentially increased the reach and operational capabilities of terrorist networks. Today's hearing will shed light on how extremists use the internet to further their goals.

When we speak about the issue of radical Islam, we must continually draw the distinction between the religion of Islam and the manner in which the religion can be exploited and distorted by violent extremists to inspire and justify their actions. We must never associate the reprehensible behavior of violent extremists with the entire Muslim faith.

I would like to welcome all of our witnesses. In particular, I would like to recognize Frank Cilluffo for his extensive work on the issue of radicalization. Mr. Cilluffo has been among the first to present constructive recommendations of actions the federal government can take to address and prevent extremism domestically. His work on the Homeland Security Advisory Council Future of Terrorism Task Force informed my recent Sense of the Senate Resolution on combating domestic radicalization, which passed the Senate on March 13, 2007 as part of S. 4, the *Improving America's Security Act of 2007*.

The federal government has an important role to play in fostering positive relations and building strong community ties. I am convinced that to prevent radicalization, we must work to better engage Muslim communities across America and facilitate interfaith dialogue to prevent isolation. I am pleased to note that in my home state of Ohio, there is a strong multicultural relations outreach effort.

There is a theological debate that must take place within Islam regarding modernity. We have an opportunity to influence this debate by upholding American values of democracy and tolerance, and ensuring that American Muslims are engaged rather than alienated.

Although the U.S. government cannot prevent use of the internet by extremists, we have an opportunity to thwart their operations through the use of intelligence. We must also encourage the development and availability of a peaceful counter-narrative to challenge the extremists' message. I look forward to learning from the witnesses about the scope of current efforts in this regard, as well as recommendations for improvement.