



**Statement of
John Miller
Assistant Director
Office of Public Affairs, Federal Bureau of Investigation**

**Before the
United States Senate
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs**

**“Violent Islamist Extremism:
Government Efforts to Defeat It”**

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Good afternoon Chairman Lieberman, Ranking Member Collins, and Members of the Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to discuss the FBI’s Community Outreach Program in my capacity as the Assistant Director of the FBI’s Office of Public Affairs. I am happy to join with my colleagues here from the Department of State and Department of Treasury, as well as USAID to discuss with you the important efforts of the U.S. Government to strengthen our relationship with segments of the community to better allow us to recognize and prevent violent and other illegal activities.

RADICALIZATION?

At its root, radicalization takes the basic tenets of a faith or a political movement and carries them to extremes, extremes that often are drastic enough to adopt violence to intimidate others into accepting those extremes or to punish those who will not accept the extremes, and that process carries across lines of nationality or religion, from Mohammad Atta to Timothy McVeigh.

The FBI, consistent with the First Amendment, defines radical individuals as persons who encourage, endorse, condone, justify, or support the commission of a violent act or

other crimes against the U.S. government, its citizens, or its allies for political, social, or economic ends.

The FBI recognizes four steps in the radicalization process: pre-radicalization, identification, indoctrination, and action. Each step is separate and distinct from the others. Indeed, an individual who completes the first step may never move beyond that first significant action.

The concern with radicalization has always been a part of FBI efforts at outreach into minority and ethnic communities, but this concern has intensified in the aftermath of attacks orchestrated by “homegrown” extremists in Spain, the United Kingdom, and even in the United States. We have seen cases of radicalization of Americans here in Virginia, Portland, Los Angeles, Toledo, and Chicago. And we are not alone. Just last week, a judge sentenced five British citizens to life in prison for plotting to attack targets in London. Others await trial in Canada. These plots have transformed radicalization from an ominous theory into a dangerous reality. And the FBI -- as it has been doing for the past six years -- continues to examine approaches to outreach and develop new ones to address this issue. We cannot effectively counter radicalization without first identifying some of fundamental questions about the nature of radicalization. And we must realize that the answers will not quick-coming or simple.

To understand why any Muslim -- or by extrapolation any minority -- would be susceptible to radicalization the first question that must be asked is what it means to be a Muslim in America? Or what it means to be an American Muslim? There are many factors that may be important to these questions.

In this environment, we cannot just show up at the door and say: “we are from the government and we are here to help.” Instead, the government must earn the trust and respect of such groups. Overcoming distrust and suspicion, especially in the Muslim community, will not, however, be achieved quickly. And we must recognize that developing metrics or statistics to measure the success of the mission is nearly impossible. For example, how can we know if the conversation we have with that 15-year old boy in one of our youth programs dissuaded him from embracing radicalization? How can we know if the brochure that a young girl read inspired her to consider employment with the FBI? Yet the lack of clear metrics should not suggest that our efforts are either unimportant or ineffective.

CIVIL RIGHTS

In getting to know a community, the FBI must confront the same balancing test that it faced even before 9/11: we must strive to protect the civil rights and privacy concerns of individuals in minority and ethnic communities while we work to identify and preempt the planning and execution of terrorist activities in our country. This is not a mission that lends itself to easy solutions, but I want to reassure this Committee that in our efforts to identify and stem radicalization, we work hard to ensure that individuals’ constitutional rights are not compromised.

The laws of the United States, including the constitutional guarantees of free speech and freedom of religion are, in fact, enormous aids in our outreach to the minority and ethnic communities. In other parts of the world, where such activities are not protected, individuals are muted or forced underground where their anger and frustration festers and

often leads to radicalization and violence. In the United States, individuals can vocalize their frustrations, speak directly to their government, and have law enforcement that protects those very rights.

COUNTERING RADICALIZATION

So what are these other options? What has the FBI been doing to counter the threat of radicalization?

- First, since 9/11, much attention has been given to messages encouraging Muslims toward radicalization. To counter such messages, the FBI engages national Muslim organizations in the United States that have public positions against terrorism and radicalization. The FBI, through its Community Relations Unit at FBI Headquarters, has constructed relationships with a variety of national Arab-American and Muslim organizations. Two concrete results of those relationships have been a biannual meeting with the FBI Director and a national level phone conference call with key leaders bi-monthly. The FBI Director has found his meetings with the leaders from the various communities to be mutually beneficial and an opportunity to view the world through the eyes of these U.S. citizens. After the last meeting, a working group was organized to convert discussion points into actionable items, as moving from talking to taking concrete action is key. The bi-monthly conference calls allow the organizations at the street level to call up to their national branches, which in turn can bring key issues to the attention of FBI headquarters. We then identify “action items,” either for the FBI or for the

community based organizations, to carry out. Progress is gauged on the next conference call. The conference calls are also initiated spontaneously to brief the community on breaking events or to allow the community to bring an exigent issue to the attention of the FBI at the national level.

- Second, a lot of work is taking place at the grassroots for the FBI. Our Special Agents in Charge and our Assistant Directors in Charge have reached out to minority and ethnic communities in their domains, where the potential for radicalization is the greatest. The 56 field offices of the FBI have created innovative programs to communicate with the diverse groups within in their domains, and in turn, each of the Community Outreach Specialists brief the Assistant Director for Public Affairs every sixty days in person via secure video conference. This communication allows us to stay abreast of the outreach efforts, successes, and challenges. This process also allows us to identify best practices by Community Outreach Specialists and share them widely.
- Third, the FBI brings many U.S. citizens into its offices across the country through its Citizens Academies. This program -- now in every FBI field office -- allows citizens to view the Bureau from the inside and to learn about its missions and the difficulties faced in carrying out those missions. A strong effort is made at the field office to attract minorities to the classes, so that we are able to directly interact with individuals from various walks of life.
- Fourth, and closely related to the Citizens Academy is the Community Relations Executive Seminar Training or, as we call it, CREST. This program

is the Citizens Academy on a smaller scale. The program is tailored with input from the requesting organization and addresses issues that are of immediate concern to that organization. The CREST can be held at a venue chosen by the requesting organization. This program allows the FBI to reach into communities where trust with the government or the FBI in particular needs to be built. The CREST program allows us to demystify the FBI and its work. CREST also allows the participants to choose the curriculum. We have found that issues regarding terrorism are not always the first choice for the seminar in Arab-American or Muslim communities. In some cases, these communities have asked for seminars on child safety on the internet and on crimes like identity theft and credit card fraud. These crimes affect the Muslim communities like any other. The effectiveness of the CREST program is that it is often the starting point for bridging the gaps of trust that may exist between the FBI and a given community. In the context of countering radicalization, a key step is to develop relationships within the community based on trust and to do so under non-stressful circumstances rather than in the immediate aftermath of an incident. CREST is a first step in that building process.

- Fifth, the FBI recognizes the crucial need to address the youth in minority communities, and so we have formulated targeted programs. Our field offices sponsor teen academies that are designed to introduce youth to the FBI. We have continued the Junior Special Agent program, designed to introduce youth to the mission and work of the FBI, to encourage good citizenship, and to

encourage youth to consider a career with the FBI. We have also sponsored various youth conferences at the local level, including a very successful Pakistani Youth Conference in a joint effort with our New York field office and the Community Relations Unit at Headquarters.

- Sixth, in the past few weeks, our Community Relations Unit held a conference call with community leaders focused exclusively on countering radicalization. The chief of that unit, Brett Hovington, hosted the call.

RECOGNIZING PROGRESS

Muslim leaders on the recent call acknowledged a growing fear of radicalization by the United States government. According to the group on the call, however, most American Muslim leaders do not think their community is as ripe for radicalization as many observers believe, and these leaders are fearful that by increasing media and public attention on the potential for radicalization in the Muslim community, we may reinforce what some leaders believe is a cloud of suspicion that hangs over their community in post-9/11 America. These leaders emphasized that, in their view, if we overlook the progress we have made, we do so at our own peril. While it is hard to determine whether putting a spotlight on the issue helps defeat radicalization or actually reinforces a negative stereotype, the conference call is a good example of the frank dialogue that now exists between the FBI and the Muslim community's leaders.

Today, the Director of the FBI can pick up the phone and talk to leaders from the various communities in an instant; three or four years ago, that would not have been possible. As I mentioned earlier, the Director of the FBI sits at a table with those same

leaders twice a year; three or four years ago, that was not happening. Throughout the country, Arab-Americans regularly participate in Citizens Academies; three or four years ago, that did not take place. Today, FBI headquarters measures whether outreach efforts across the 56 field divisions are being carried out effectively. Two years ago, we could not do that. We do not intend for these achievements to encourage complacency; the FBI knows that plenty of work still needs to be done in our outreach, not just with the Arab-American and Muslim communities, but with all ethnic and minority communities. But progress has been made, and we and particularly our Muslim-American fellow citizens agree that we need to tend our accomplishments carefully.

We now have partners in the Arab-American and Muslim communities. Some have become publicly declared allies in our efforts to condemn terrorism. They have become our bridge to many who viewed the FBI with either contempt, or worse, fear. They now come through the doors of the FBI and feel free to share their views on sensitive issues. We commend our friends for their efforts, and we commend the leaders of the other minority and ethnic communities who have also become friends with the FBI and who are building similar relationships for their communities.

And while we realize – all too well – that we are going to have disagreements with these same communities, we are talking. And, given the circumstances of today's world that is what matters most. The leadership of the American Muslim community is working vigorously on many levels to emphasize that American Muslims are Americans. American Muslims welcome the opportunity to cooperate with the FBI and other authorities to ensure the safety and security of their communities and the United States.

CONCLUSION

I hope these few minutes have painted a clearer picture of the FBI's strategy to counter radicalization. As our friends on the London Metropolitan Police Force recently told us, this project will take time, and if we cannot immediately measure the results, we must not become disillusioned. I believe this will be a three step process. First, we must address the issue of trust. Second, we must seek to achieve true partnership. Third, we must leverage that partnership to achieve positive change. It has been said that even the longest journey begins with one step. We in the FBI have taken many steps, but we and our community partners understand the journey ahead is long.

I thank the Chairman and the Members of the Committee for their interest in this important issue affecting our nation and look forward to answering any questions you may have.

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