

Written Testimony of
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“Threat of Islamic Radicalization to the Homeland”

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INTRODUCTION

Chairman Lieberman, Senator Collins and other distinguished Senators: Thank you for the opportunity to share perspectives on the threat of Islamic radicalism to the homeland. I appreciate the opportunity to appear along side my colleague Daniel Sutherland today. We work closely with the Office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties and the Privacy Office to ensure all of our activities are fully consistent with constitutional and federal law.

The spate of terrorist attacks in Western Europe over the past several years and the more recent disruption of extremist cells in North America highlight the threat radicalization poses. We believe the threat we face in the near term is less than that currently confronting our European allies, but we are concerned that radicalization will continue to expand within the United States over the long term.

In general, we have found that it is more difficult for radicalized individuals in the United States to turn their ideologically-driven violent inclinations into successful terrorist attacks. We believe that in Europe there exist closer links between criminal and extremist social networks and that Europe's larger pool of disaffected Muslims have more opportunity to connect with terrorist groups tied to al-Qa'ida globally. In the United Kingdom, several cases of home-grown radicalization have been linked to al-Qa'ida, who provided both operational expertise and ideological reinforcement in attack planning. Thus far, we have not seen these types of linkages

between homegrown extremists and international terrorist groups in the United States, but we remain vigilant, and recognize that we are not immune to the threat.

In response to the threat, the Department's Office of Intelligence and Analysis realigned its analytic cadre in late 2006, and created a branch focused exclusively on radicalization and extremism in the homeland. This branch focuses on understanding the 'how and why' radicalizing influences take root. This approach differs from the traditional counterterrorism emphasis on the who, what, where, and when of potential threats. In studying the radicalization phenomena, we are working closely with our Federal, State, and local partners and are focusing on a wide range of actors and organizations both Islamic – those who try to gain legitimacy by illegitimately wrapping themselves within Islam – as well as non-religious extremists.

By identifying critical factors at the "front end" of the radicalization process, we will assist policymakers, and intelligence and law enforcement officers in developing the tools, procedures, and methods needed to prevent radical beliefs from "crossing the line" to committing violence. This Office of Intelligence and Analysis project is part of a broader DHS approach in addressing the issue of radicalization.

CONCEPTUAL APPROACHES

No universal definition of radicalization exists in the intelligence or the academic/social science communities. We have, therefore,

developed a “working” definition. Radicalization entails “*the process of adopting an extremist belief system, including the willingness to use, support, or facilitate violence, as a method to effect societal change.*” This definition separates radicalization from terrorism by emphasizing the difference between related social patterns, some of which may eventually lead to terrorism. Within these patterns we are interested in the interplay between radical actor groups and “nodes.” Radical actor groups are communities and sub populations experiencing radicalization. Nodes are the conduits facilitating or supporting a person or group through the radicalization process. They may be physical institutions, virtual communities, charismatic individuals, written or recorded material, or even shared experiences.

METHODOLOGY

My Office is taking a phased approach in studying radicalization, focusing more on examining radicalization dynamics in key geographic regions throughout the country. Our first phase focused on assessments in California and the New York City Metropolitan area to include New Jersey. Our second phase focuses on the Midwest, the National Capital Region, and Texas. We will conduct other regional or state assessments in future phases, with the goal of providing the building blocks for a more comprehensive national baseline assessment.

Each regional assessment begins by framing an intelligence picture unique to that state or region. First, we examine national-level intelligence reporting and open-source information. We then take

those findings and share them during face-to-face meetings with federal, state, and local law enforcement, intelligence, and homeland security professionals to gain their insights. As of March 2007, we have held analytic exchanges on radicalization with state and municipal representatives from: New York City; Albany (NY); Los Angeles; San Diego; San Francisco; Sacramento; Chicago; Columbus (OH); Springfield (IL); Richmond, Baltimore; Washington DC; Detroit; Houston; Austin (TX); El Paso; Huntsville (TX); and Raleigh (NC). We have found that a number of foreign governments also are keenly interested in the issue of radicalization and possess in-depth substantive knowledge. Our meetings with officials from these countries have helped to strengthen and broaden our perspectives and knowledge.

FINDINGS

Our research indicates that the radicalization dynamic varies across ideological and ethno-religious spectrums, different geographic regions, and socio-economic conditions. We have found that there are many diverse “pathways” to radicalization and that it is not a “one-way street.” Individuals and groups can radicalize or “de-radicalize” because of a variety of factors. Most of the groups and individuals we examined thus far did not appear committed to the final “stage” of the radicalization process—that is, the use of violence.

Our work on radicalization is preliminary and by no means complete. Some of our initial findings include:

- Radicalization occurs through a variety of human and institutional catalysts, such as formal and informal religious institutions (for example prisons), and increasingly within university settings and youth groups. Charismatic leaders and the Internet play significant roles in this process.
- Charismatic leaders naturally attract individuals willing to emulate their actions based on their views of the world. Within a radical context, the engaging personalities of the leaders enable them to instill a brand of extreme ideology in impressionable individuals, particularly the youth.
- Globalization has created a dynamic environment characterized by a confluence of political, religious, racial, and cultural flashpoints. This environment is being exploited by a small, yet influential number of radical actors who are hostile toward the United States.
- Radicalization is “marketed” through diverse methods by distinct actors with extreme ideological views. The methods used by extremist actors to market their message are tailored to appeal to the various audiences.
- Extremists are adept at developing propaganda and manipulating social situations to create perceptions of victimization. They will use deliberate actions for the sole purpose of provoking media, law enforcement, or political responses that can be used later for propaganda purposes.
- Insular communities with little exposure to moderating influences are particularly vulnerable to radical messages if

they are isolated and alienated from the surrounding society.

The nature of this alienation determines who is responsible for their discontent.

- The Office of Intelligence and Analysis has identified several groups active in the United States that serve as “gateways” to radicalization because of their doctrines, ideologies, and activities as well as the character of their leadership and membership. The experience of joining these groups may involve a deterioration of familial, social, and societal ties resulting in the acceptance of a new collective identity with the group. Most of the groups effecting this socialization do not directly support violent extremism. That said, violent actors on the periphery of the group may exploit the socialization process to spot, assess, and recruit vulnerable individuals.
- Radicalization in prison is becoming increasingly common. The nature of the prison environment, coupled with societal marginalization of convicts, cultivates a strong desire for social bonding, group identity, protection, spiritual guidance, and positive reinforcement, all things that extremist actors exploit. The degree to which prison radicalization is problematic varies greatly from state to state. While high-profile cases in recent years focused attention on the radicalization of Muslim inmates, this phenomenon is significantly less endemic than recruitment and violence by criminal and racists gangs in U.S. prisons.
- “Lone-wolf” radicalization is not unique to any particular ideology, and the ease of mass communications portends an increase in acts of terror by violent individuals. Moreover,

formal affiliation with a group is not a predicate to radicalization, nor is it a predicate to being trained, obtaining resources, or otherwise supporting an operational capability.

INITIATIVES

My Office has several key initiatives to analyze and report on radicalization dynamics. This year I directed my intelligence analysts to reach out to relevant State and Local Fusion Centers (SLFCs) to develop joint analytic products, centered on radicalization. Our analysts continue to travel and meet with state and local intelligence and law enforcement professionals to present our findings on radicalization and extremism and to solicit their unique insight into what is taking place in their communities.

I also have initiated programs designed to provide the physical infrastructure and information management technology to allow for the sharing of intelligence reporting and analytical products on radicalization. Under the Homeland Security Information Network (HSIN), we have established a Community of Interest (COI) for analysts at DHS and SLFCs to collaborate. This capability allows for protected virtual exchange so that homeland security analysts can collaborate while being protected from intrusion. We are also posting both intelligence reporting and analytical products at the unclassified and For Official Use Only levels. Importantly, earlier this year, we hosted an analyst conference inviting current and potential users of the COI to meet with our analysts. A key theme of the discussions

was radicalization in the homeland. We plan additional conferences in the months ahead.

Currently, my Office, in full coordination with the Department's Chief Information Officer, is deploying the Homeland Secure Data Network (HSDN) at the SECRET level to the SLFCs. The establishment of these capabilities is a major step forward in increasing our collaborative efforts to better understand radicalization dynamics in the homeland and information sharing in general.

Finally, we are exploring methods to develop a capability to track emerging radicalization trends before they manifest into violence. As we collect additional data on radicalization, it may be possible to provide indicators of the process here in the United States. While our initial assessments have been focused on establishing a baseline, we are now seeking to establish radicalization indicators that can be measured over time. These indicators could then be disseminated to the SLFCs in order to train officers in how to code law enforcement and intelligence reporting. Coding law enforcement and intelligence reporting for radicalization activity and measuring it over time should make it possible to enhance our "warning" capability on this issue. Ultimately we should be able to identify those populations and locales where radicalization is occurring, as well as its scope. This information can then be collected and analyzed nationally and be used to help target counter-radicalization efforts more specifically, objectively, and appropriately.

CONCLUSION

The Department, and the Office of Intelligence and Analysis, recognizes that radicalization is a serious homeland security challenge. Therefore, we are working with determination to ensure that we develop and maintain consistent awareness of radicalization trends and actors, both in the United States and abroad. We are dedicating ourselves to fortifying and sustaining the analytical capabilities that are critical in preventing and mitigating threats from radicalization.

Mr. Chairman, thank you again for giving me the opportunity to speak with you and the members of the Committee on this significant homeland security issue. I welcome your questions.