

House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence  
Subcommittee on Terrorism, HUMINT, Analysis and Counterintelligence  
Open Hearing on Counter-Radicalization

July 27, 2011

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Mike Thompson

Thank you, Madame Chair.

Dr. Gannon and Dr. Neumann, welcome and thank you for your work and for being here today.

We are all here today because we want to prevent violent extremism and want to keep our families and communities safe.

Dr. Neumann's report examines how the US can counter efforts by al-Qa'ida and affiliates to radicalize and recruit young Americans to commit violent acts against America.

As the Chair noted and the recent tragedy in Norway shows, violent extremism is not unique to America, Islam or terrorism. Hate-based violence is not limited to any one group. Since Dr. Neumann has considerable experience in Europe, I am very interested in hearing his analysis of the Norwegian incident in context with the themes expressed in his current report on America.

Even in the US, we have experienced this type of violence in situations that were unrelated to al-Qa'ida. In his statement, Dr. Gannon noted several examples, such as militias in western states, the violence of Timothy McVeigh and radical, anti-establishment groups in the 1960s and 1970s.

Thus, it is not a new phenomenon for America to be confronted with a segment of its youth feeling alienated from mainstream society and being steered to violence. We have a track record of law enforcement and social agencies working to identify at-risk individuals and taking action before they commit violent acts.

I agree with this report's assessment that we must act as a unified nation to counter al-Qa'ida: the more that Americans isolate the Muslim community from mainstream America, the less credible the US will be in convincing at-risk youth that America believes it is completely compatible to be an observant Muslim and a valued American citizen.

I commend this report and the Bipartisan Policy Center for emphasizing that the key to success in counter-radicalization is respect.

If influential voices in American society, such as media pundits or public officials, suspect Muslim Americans as a group – or use inflammatory rhetoric when discussing Islam -- it will be virtually impossible for federal and local governments to gain the trust of law-abiding Muslim-Americans.

If we speak with Muslim-Americans only about terrorism, instead of about the economy, education and the other issues that are important to all Americans, we are not showing respect.

If, on the other hand, counter-radicalization programs include training and messaging to educate all Americans about the concerns and contributions of Muslim-Americans, we have a better chance to build a partnership against the real enemy – terrorist recruiters.

While the written report correctly focuses on messaging to at-risk communities, I would like the witnesses to discuss what their research has disclosed about the attitudes of the general US population on Muslim-Americans and issues related to counter-radicalization. Effective messaging to the whole population will be needed for a successful strategy.

In general, the findings and recommendations of this report are well-intentioned and admirable, but they raise two questions that I think deserve more discussion:

First, the report argues the need for a coordinated federal-local government counter-radicalization program, but offers few examples of existing initiatives in the country. While I fully agree that we can do more, I think more credit has to be given to all private and public entities that have been working with at-risk communities since 9/11. I would like the witnesses to discuss best practices in existing programs they have studied.

Second, I would like our witnesses to focus on how practical their recommendations are for such a large, heterogeneous country as the US. While the report acknowledges that there are challenges in mounting new initiatives in the current fiscal environment, I would like to hear specific steps that the government can take to improve counter-radicalization efforts.

Again, I believe that this report makes many valuable points and I admire the bipartisan spirit underlying it. I look forward to our discussion. Thank you, Madame Chair.