

**Opening Statement of Chairman Joseph Lieberman
Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee Hearing
“The Internet: A Portal for Islamist Extremists.”
Washington, DC
May 3, 2007**

Good morning. This morning we will focus on a most alarming subject! “The Internet: A Portal for Islamist Extremists.”

This is the third hearing that this Committee has held during the last half of the year on the topic of Islamist radicalization and recruitment.

The first, under Senator Collins’ leadership, addressed Islamist radicalization and recruitment in America’s prison system.

Then this March, Secretary Chertoff and other witnesses from the Department of Homeland Security testified about the threat we face from Islamist extremists here at home and what they are doing to protect us from that threat.

At that hearing, Secretary Chertoff testified that Islamist extremists pose the greatest threat to our homeland security today and that they are using the Internet as their primary recruiting tool.

This morning, we will hear from three witnesses who will testify more specifically about how the extremists are using the Internet for recruiting and other purposes.

The Committee plans to continue to focus on this critical threat next week with another hearing where we will ask what other agencies - including the FBI and the Department of State – are doing to assess and confront the threat of internet based terrorist activity.

It is another irony of the digital age that the internet – invented by the Department of Defense as a way to ensure uninterrupted communications in the event of an enemy attack – is now being used to recruit and train the terrorists who plot such lethal attacks against American and other western targets.

As we will hear today, Islamists who have made a global political ideology out of a religion, use the internet as a way to reach across national boundaries to recruit new soldiers, sympathizers and financial supporters.

It is a focused campaign in which Islamist terrorists use the internet to broadcast news, propagandize, and conduct on-line classes in terrorist tactics and ideology.

They also use the internet to transcend gaps in space and time, to research potential targets and share information with each other about planned operations.

We will hear today from Frank Cilluffo, director of George Washington University's Homeland Security Policy Institute. Along with Dr. Greg Saathoff of the University of Virginia's Critical Incident Analysis Group, Mr. Cilluffo co-chaired a task force on Internet Radicalization that is releasing a report as part of this hearing.

The Task Force's report tells us that the people who create these web-based extremist propaganda and recruitment machines have a slogan: "Keyboard equals Kalashnikov," a contemporary twist on the old adage that the pen is mightier than the sword.

The most macabre example of their exploitation of the Internet is one we will hear today from Lt. Col. Joseph Felter, director of the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point.

In an effort to raise its visibility and recruit new members, an Iraqi insurgent group held a website design contest open to anyone in the world with an internet connection.

First prize was the opportunity to launch a rocket attack against American forces in Iraq, with just the click of the mouse from the winner's computer.

These are not the efforts of amateurs. Terrorist groups run their own professional media production companies that produce video and audio for internet broadcast, they create websites, chat rooms, online forums, libraries and video games that promote the Islamist agenda. They are a clear and present danger.

The United States must take the challenge posed by these internet terrorists very seriously and launch an aggressive coordinated and effective response. We cannot cede cyberspace to the Islamist terrorists.

We must do everything we can as quickly as we can to disrupt their websites and compete with them for the attention of all who frequent them.

We need to monitor these sites constantly for information and use them to exploit divisions among different sects and factions.

We need to recruit “trolls” who can sow seeds of doubt on the different extremist websites and chat rooms.

And we must develop the ability to shut these sites down when danger is imminent.

It's tragic that the internet – this marvelous 21st Century technology – has become a twisted tool for those who seek to kill innocent people and try to sow fear and division in the free world.

As this hearing will show that is the real challenge we face so we must meet it.

Senator Collins.