



# United States Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

Chairman Joseph I. Lieberman, ID-Conn.

**Opening Statement for Senator Joseph I. Lieberman**

**Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee Meeting**

**The Threat of Islamic Radicalism to the Homeland**

**Washington, D.C.**

**March 14, 2007**

Good morning. This is the first in a series of hearings our Committee will conduct as part of a broad investigation into the threat Islamist extremism inside the U.S. poses to the American people.

Today we will focus on what we are doing to detect, deter, and defeat that threat. I thank Secretary Chertoff and Mr. Allen and Mr. Sutherland for being here today to share with us the Department of Homeland Security's views and plans.

The Department's own Homeland Security Advisory Council, in its report on the future of terrorism reached some sobering conclusions about the challenges ahead. It called radical Islam "the most significant terrorist threat to the homeland today," said that it is spreading, and predicted that the number and magnitude of attacks on the United States will increase.

We Americans have already been attacked several times by these terrorists – at the Marine Barracks in Beirut in 1983, at the World Trade Center in 1993, the embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania, the attack on the USS Cole as it lay in Port in Yemen, the bombing of the Khobar Towers, and of course 9/11/01.

Those attacks either occurred abroad or were carried out inside the U.S. by people who came here from abroad with that evil intention. We will focus in these hearings on the threat of "homegrown terrorism" in the United States. But, obviously, we're focusing on it as part of a larger global threat.

We must do this because we have already seen homegrown terrorism more graphically and dramatically in Europe.

The London subway terrorist bombings and the Madrid bombings were caused by either citizens or long-time residents of the United Kingdom or Spain. Similar plots by citizens or residents of the Netherlands, Denmark, and France have been foiled.

In fact, the director of MI-5 in Great Britain intensified my interest on this when she said last fall that her agency has identified more than 200 cells, with a total of 1,600 individuals who are plotting or facilitating acts of terrorism in the U.K.

Is the same thing happening here in the U.S.? Could it be happening? Those are the questions this hearing will ask and hopefully answer with the cooperation of the Homeland Security Department and other relevant agencies of the government.

There are differences between Europe and the United States, which we will explore in future hearings. American society has welcomed Muslims just as it has embraced generations of new immigrant ethnicities before. There appears to be a greater level of assimilation of Muslims into American society than in many other countries, including many in Europe.

But last fall, Steven Simon of Georgetown University testified before this committee on the fifth anniversary of September 11, that, quote, "Muslims are increasingly choosing not to assimilate into American society, finding solace in their religious identity instead."

Assuming there is some validity to that, one possible cause clearly is the use of the Internet to promote the terrorists' dark age and hateful vision. It gives their multimedia campaigns of alienation and violence a global reach, including right into American homes and offices.

As part of this investigative series, our Committee will look at the impact of extremist propaganda on the Internet on the Islamist terrorist presence in the U.S. and how our government and people can combat it. We will also look at what Mr. Allen calls other nodes where radicalization may be occurring, including the prisons; perhaps universities, perhaps mosques.

The domestic threat to our safety will require a strong, comprehensive and creative strategy of homeland security. Remember, the 9/11 Commission said that one reason 9/11 happened was a failure of imagination, our failure to imagine that people could do what the terrorists did to us. So I think we all want to make sure that our imaginations do not fail us again as we counter this new threat of Islamist extremist and terrorist groups within our own country.

The Homeland Security Advisory Council, which I mentioned earlier, charged by Secretary Chertoff to assess the threats the U.S. will face in the next five years, has really given us some guidance on this. The task force, chaired by former Congressman Lee Hamilton and former homeland security advisor to President Bush, Frank Cilluffo, issued a report to the Secretary in January.

It found that: "Understanding the future of terrorism requires our understanding threats and developments in a wide range of areas," and, "Just as Al Qaeda has demonstrated their flexibility and capability to adapt their tactics and procedures...we must maintain the same level of flexibility [and] unpredictability."

It then recommended that "Countering 'homegrown' radicalization must be one of the Department's top priorities." I agree.

This will be an important, complex, and at times, difficult or awkward investigation and conversation. I understand that, and Sen. Collins does, too. But we must have this conversation and then act sensibly on it if we are to preserve our security and our freedom.