



June 14, 2017

**Written Statement for the Record  
by Muslim Public Affairs Council  
before the Senate Committee on Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs  
on Ideology and Terror: Understanding the Tools, Tactics, and Techniques  
of Violent Extremism**

Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member McCaskill, and distinguished Members of the Committee. The Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC) appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony for the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee hearing on “Ideology and Terror: Understanding the Tools, Tactics, and Techniques of Violent Extremism”. MPAC supports a secure homeland that ensures protection and safety for all Americans against any threat to our lives and liberty. It is because of that firm belief that we must voice serious concern over the framing and composition of this hearing.

**First, we are dismayed that the topic of addressing violent extremism is being discussed with a narrow-scope focus almost exclusively on the Muslim community.** The singling out of Muslims in this manner only breeds fear, cements a narrative of a cosmic war between Islam against the West, and flies in the face of actual trends of domestic violent extremism. Between 2001 and 2013, there were 135 domestic terror plots by non-Muslims, whereas there were 60 total domestic terror plots by Muslim perpetrators during that same time period.<sup>1</sup>

Ideologically motivated attacks by right-wing nationalists and white supremacist groups have skyrocketed over the past several years.<sup>2</sup> In just the few months since the 2016 presidential elections, the Southern Poverty Law Center has reported over 1,500 hate-motivated bias incidents, and a sharp spike in the formation of hate groups.<sup>3</sup>

In Portland last month, we saw two brave men lose their lives and a third critically wounded while defending women of color — one of whom wears a headscarf — from a vicious attack by an ideologically-motivated individual.<sup>4</sup> In his court appearance, the alleged killer shouted defiantly, “you call it terrorism; I call it patriotism!”<sup>5</sup> We must call it what it really is: violent extremism.

In October of 2016, a terrorist group called The Crusaders planned to bomb an apartment complex

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<sup>1</sup> “Post-9/11 Terrorism Database.” *Muslim Public Affairs Council*, Mpac.org, 23 April 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Perliger, Arie. “Why Far-right Extremism in America Is Rising.” *Newsweek*. Newsweek, 04 June 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Perliger, Arie. “Why Far-right Extremism in America Is Rising.” *Newsweek*. Newsweek, 04 June 2017.

<sup>3</sup> “The Year in Hate and Extremism.” Southern Poverty Law Center. SPLC.org, 15 Feb. 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Haag, Matthew, and Jacey Fortin. “Two Killed in Portland While Trying to Stop Anti-Muslim Rant, Police Say.” *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 27 May 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Press, Associated, and Nahal Toosi. “Portland Stabbing Suspect: ‘You Call It Terrorism, I Call It Patriotism!’” *Politico*. Politico.com, 30 May 2017.



in Kansas home to 120 Somali immigrants with the rabid ideological desire to “wake people up”.<sup>6</sup> If their plot had not been thwarted by FBI agents who recognized and took the threat seriously, it could have resulted in one of the deadliest bombings in recent history.

The year before, our nation reeled from an attack on an African-American church in Charleston by white supremacist Dylan Roof, who snarled at his victims that they were “taking over the country” before brutally shooting them.<sup>7</sup> The shooter had become deeply steeped in hateful ideology that led him directly on the path towards violent extremism.

All these examples point to the same conclusion: violent extremism in our nation knows no religious or racial bounds and any attempts to counter its spread by federal or local government must acknowledge and address all forms with equal seriousness and devotion of resources. This exact sentiment was just echoed recently by current DHS Secretary John Kelly when, in a public appearance on Face the Nation, he argued that the rising threat of white supremacist groups posed just as dire a threat to our national security.<sup>8</sup>

All violent extremists, whether it's ISIS or white supremacist terrorists, seek to accomplish the very same goal: to divide our world along binary lines. We have seen xenophobic hate speech encouraged on the national state lead directly to hate crimes against minority communities across the country, just as we've seen groups like ISIS use that hate to convince vulnerable individuals that they have no place in American society. Both narratives are equally untrue, and both must be equally confronted.

**Second, just as no conversation on violent extremism should single out the Muslim community, no high-level conversation on Muslims should be held without authentic representatives from the community itself.** It is great cause for alarm that neither of the panelists who purport to understand the American Muslim experience have any demonstrable experience working with American Muslim communities.<sup>9</sup> If they had, they would know that American Muslims across the nation work tirelessly to make our country safer, provide essential services to their congregations, and contribute to the prosperity of our society.

They would know that despite the fear of alienation and isolation brought on by the rise in Islamophobia, we nevertheless remain resilient and work to empower our younger generations with a strong sense of self-confidence and unapologetic expression of our religious liberty that is meant to be the bedrock of this nation. ISIS, Islamophobes, and violent white supremacists do not want that message of pluralism and celebration of individualism to win out.

Unfortunately, the panelists selected for this hearing to represent the Muslim perspective do not promote that message either. In fact, one of the panelists, Ms. Ali, has declared routinely and

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<sup>6</sup> Potter, Tim, and Amy Renee Leiker. “Three Charged in Kansas Plot to Bomb Homes, Worship Center for Somalis.” *Kansas City Star*. [kansascity.com](http://kansascity.com), 14 Oct. 2016.

<sup>7</sup> “Charleston Shooting.” *NPR*. [NPR.org](http://NPR.org)

<sup>8</sup> Watson, Kathryn. “DHS Secretary on Homegrown Terror: “I Don’t Know How to Stop That”.” *CBS News*. *CBS Interactive*, 23 Apr. 2017.

<sup>9</sup> Jones, Sarah. “The Senate Is about to Hear from Two of the Worst Possible “experts” on Islam.” *New Republic*. [Newrepublic.com](http://Newrepublic.com), 12 June 2017.

proudly that “we are at war with Islam” and that “there is no moderate Islam”.<sup>10</sup> These words echo the very same sentiments that groups like ISIS themselves promote. ISIS is desperate to be seen as the legitimate banner carrier of Islam, when neither their ideology nor monstrous actions bare any resemblance to authentic interpretations of the faith. Making such declarative statements, and representing those views in a formal capacity to this august body, is not a defiant strike against a culture of political correctness; it is a destructive and malicious fiction that violent extremists on every side champion with glee. Providing a platform for such narratives, let alone allowing them to influence policymaking at the highest levels, will only make us far less safe as a nation.

**Third, American Muslim communities have unequivocally condemned terror in the name of Islam<sup>11</sup> and created solutions to combat extremist ideologies and violence.<sup>12</sup>**

For example, MPAC created the Safe Spaces Initiative (SSI): A Toolkit for Healthy Communities.<sup>13</sup> The program empowers communities to secure the sanctity of the mosque and Muslim communities in promoting Islamic values of civic engagement, public safety and healthy identity formation.

SSI is an alternative to both heavy-handed law enforcement tactics and government-led countering violent extremism (CVE) programs. Rather than accepting the notion that the only way to deal with violent extremism is through tactics such as widespread surveillance and the use of informants, the Safe Spaces Initiative relies on community-led and community-driven programs that communities and mosques will benefit from beyond the national security context.

In fact, SSI is a framework that can and will be used for issues other than violent extremism. For example, having a space in communities where one can openly and honestly discuss relevant issues with others provides a healthy environment for people to deal with issues of addiction, family issues, domestic violence, political grievances, among many more. It also serves as a safe environment for individuals to access the necessary resources they need. SSI is about empowering communities in a way that promotes healthy vibrant communities, and the public interest for all people. Mosques do not breed extremists — in fact, as a Duke University study showed, mosques decrease radicalization — and the numbers of people who engaging in extremist acts in Islam’s name are minuscule compared to the number of Muslims who aren’t.<sup>14</sup>

**Finally, as with all communities, there is always more work that American Muslims can do to create safe spaces for positive expression, civic engagement, and holistic nurturing of all our members so that we may lead meaningful lives, achieve**

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<sup>10</sup> Van Bakel, Rogier, “‘The Trouble Is the West’.” *Reason*. Reason.com, 10 Oct. 2007

<sup>11</sup> “Muslims Condemn.” [www.muslimscondemn.com](http://www.muslimscondemn.com)

<sup>12</sup> “Safe Spaces Initiative: A Toolkit for Developing Healthy Communities.” *Muslim Public Affairs Council*. Mpac.org.

<sup>13</sup> “Safe Spaces Initiative: A Toolkit for Developing Healthy Communities.” *Muslim Public Affairs Council*. Mpac.org.

<sup>14</sup> Schanzer, David, and Charles Kurzman. “Anti-Terror Lessons of Muslim-Americans.” Duke University, 6 Jan. 2010

**economic empowerment, and provide safety and security for our families.** But by necessity this work must be community led, without the specter of government or law enforcement involvement creating ripples of distrust and furthering the criminalization of entire segments of our population.

Like all houses of worship, mosques are often the epicenter of community life, and provide essential social services from mental health counseling to assistance for families in need. On top of those common responsibilities, Muslim community centers often operate under the perpetual fear of attack by violent extremists, a paranoia justified by the well-documented spike in arson attacks across the country. If this committee genuinely desires to support American Muslims, and push back against the narrative that we exist as a second-class community, it would do well to advocate for increased federal and local support for vital social services programs and improved resources for protecting houses of worship against attacks by violent extremists.

Ultimately, the most effective response to the rising threat of violent extremism is a wholesale rejection of the divisive ideology that underpins all its forms. While MPAC applauds this committee for its dedication to improving our homeland security, we reiterate that ensuring safety for all Americans must include acknowledging and confronting all forms of violent extremism and centering authentic voices for any community directly affected by policy conversations. Furthermore, those communities most under attack must be protected and given the space and resources to serve the needs of their members. Only by recognizing that the same thread of hate ties all who seek to divide us together can we overcome their effects and respond in unison with a voice far greater.