

Written Testimony of

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“Understanding Xenophobia and its Relationship to the Threat of Radicalization:
A Homeland Security Perspective”

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Chairman Hastings, and distinguished members of the Commission, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. It is a privilege to testify about the global problem of xenophobia, research on the consequences of perceived individual and group discrimination, and what governments can do to prevent and prepare for threats to national security due to these societal ills. We have a lot to learn from the experiences of European ethnic minority and religious groups and hope that the testimonies today will bring us one step closer to tackling the complex issues of multiculturalism and societal integration in our respective countries.

There is a growing prevalence of violent hate crimes, xenophobic political platforms, and reports of unequal treatment experienced by racial and ethnic minorities within the countries of the Organization for Security and Cooperation of Europe (OSCE)¹. Of particular concern are accounts by Muslim and Jewish groups of experiences with discrimination, alienation, and political isolation. The attacks of September 11th signaled to the world that members of a discontented Islamic diaspora in Europe, directed by al-Qa'ida, could organize and execute an attack on the United States. While this incident awakened the United States to the consequences of radicalization of immigrant fundamentalist groups living in Europe, it also signaled our need to better understand the process of radicalization at the individual and group level.

Our understanding of the relationship between immigrant status, religious identification, experiences with discrimination, and the radicalization of belief and behavior is still at its nascent stage. To stimulate the research pipeline to meet this need in 2004, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) initiated a competition for an academic Center of Excellence (COE) to understand the social and behavioral aspects of terrorism and responses to terrorism. In 2005 the University of Maryland was selected to lead the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START). START was awarded \$12 million dollars for a 3 year term of research.

Research by the DHS's START COE has coalesced around the idea that there are two clusters of factors that facilitate radicalization: individual characteristics and characteristics of the society in which an individual lives. START investigators Dr. Clark McCauley and DHS post-doc Sophia Moskalenko have just completed a

¹ <http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/discrimination/reports.asp?country=multi&id=5&misc1=survey2>

manuscript identifying mechanisms that can serve as radicalization catalysts for individuals, groups, as well as societies². At the individual level, personal victimization, political grievances, and joining a radical group, seem to initiate a “slippery slope” of increasingly extreme behaviors. At the group level, isolation and perceived threats to a group serve to heighten the potential for group radicalization. As such, country contexts that support the victimization of people based on their ethnic or religious identities may produce pockets of individuals ripe to be radicalized into extremist behavior. Important to note in these early studies is that religiosity and religious identity are not what lead people to become radicalized³. Rather, the political grievances people feel from living in country contexts in which religious discrimination is tolerated or commonplace, leads them to seek similar others and form social networks and/or organizations, which can then become conduits for radicalization. Simply stated, for the victims of discrimination, political grievances, personal victimization, and isolation, can become catalysts to radical action. To test this relationship, START political scientists Jon Wilkenfeld and Victor Asal are investigating whether ethnic organizations are likely to turn to violence and terror in order to express their discontent with country conditions⁴. This work is currently supported by the DHS’s START COE as we are interested in uncovering pathways to extremism and the link between political grievances and radicalization amongst ethnic minority and immigrant groups.

As a Department, Homeland Security is approaching the phenomenon of radicalization amongst minority communities in a variety of ways. The DHS Science and Technology (S&T) Directorate is making significant research investments to better understand, predict, and prevent the threat of radicalization. The START COE, which is sponsored by the Office of University Programs, has over 30 active research projects on the social behavioral aspects of terrorism. In addition to the Center’s research program, they are engaged in unique educational activities like a multi-campus project to encourage dialogues between Muslim, Christian, and Jewish students. Activities include

² McCauley, C. & Moskalenko, S. (2007). Mechanisms of political radicalization: pathways toward terrorism. In press. *Journal of Terrorism and Political Violence* .

³ Schbley, A. & McCauley, C. (2005). Political, Religious and Psychological Characteristics of Muslim Protest Marchers, in Eight European Cities, Jerusalem Day 2002. *Journal of Terrorism and Political Violence*, 17(4).

⁴ http://www.start.umd.edu/publications/research_briefs/20070202_wilkenfeld.pdf

retreats involving students from different faith traditions; dinner series for campus leaders from different religious communities; collaborative community-service projects; and the development of multimedia arts programs focused on fostering respect for different faith traditions. The idea here is that building the social relationships between faith traditions can help mitigate potential conflicts when more serious differences arise.

The DHS S&T Human Factors Division (HFD) has as one of its core missions “to apply the social and behavioral sciences to improve detection, analysis, and understanding of the threats posed by individuals, groups, radical movements.” This Division has created a dynamic research program on radicalization and radicalization deterrence. START supports HFD’s operational focus by providing fundamental knowledge discovery. HFD builds on this knowledge with research programs that identify actionable indication and warnings that support the effective use of intervention and deterrence options. HFD’s programs through the national labs also integrate these indicators into tools for use by intelligence analysts, policymakers, and operational components in identifying a threat and preventing an attack.

The DHS Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (CRCL), led by Daniel Sutherland, has been at the forefront of the Department’s efforts to engage key communities with the belief that “promoting civic participation can help prevent the isolation and alienation that many believe are necessary precursors for radicalization.”⁵ In this regard, the CRCL Office holds regular meetings with ethnic and religious community leaders about its mission and challenges and listens to the concerns and ideas of these communities. By developing and cultivating partnerships with American Arab, Muslim, Sikh and South Asian leaders, CRCL hopes to have open lines of communication and promote civic engagement amongst members of religious communities in the United States.

We know from statistical data that Muslim communities in Europe and American Arab and Muslim communities differ in their levels of integration, wealth, and levels of

⁵ From Daniel Sutherland’s March 14, 2007 testimony to the United States Senate’s Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs entitled “Threat of Islamic Radicalization to the Homeland”.

education. We know much less about how these communities differ in their relationships to national governments, nature of their political grievances, and radical beliefs and/or radical actions. What we do know is that we share a need to increase the integration of new immigrants, and the tolerance of host societies for newcomers, particularly those from the Arab and Muslim worlds, if we hope to prevent the tiny proportion of those individuals who may become vulnerable to radicalization.

In conclusion, we have a long road ahead in better understanding the causes and consequences of being the target of xenophobia, how discriminatory conditions contribute to the phenomenon of radicalization, and the ways in which governments can proactively address these issues. In the aftermath of the 2005 London bombing DHS Secretary Michael Chertoff made a public statement that “America values its rich diversity. Muslims in America have long been part of the fabric of our nation. The actions of a few extremists cannot serve as a reflection on the many people who have made valuable contributions to our society.” Senior government leaders in the U.S. and in Europe need to be encouraged to make public statements of support for diversity and civic engagement if we want to foster climates conducive for peaceful societies. Simultaneously we need to invest significant resources in researching the root causes of radicalization within one’s own country context. The lessons learned from these domestic investigations need to be shared rapidly, and often, with international counterparts to facilitate knowledge transfer and build a science of radicalization. Lastly, we have to encourage civic engagement in key minority communities by government outreach and public education regarding prosocial means of expressing political grievances and becoming involved in civic society. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and I welcome your questions.