

US Congress holds anti-Muslim hearing

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The Homeland Security Committee in the US House of Representatives held a hearing Thursday on allegations by the committee's chairman, Republican Congressman Peter King of Long Island, that American Muslims are refusing to collaborate fully with US government anti-terrorism investigations.

King has given the hearing the title, "The Extent of Radicalization in the American Muslim Community and That Community's Response," which suggests that its purpose was not to ask questions but provide answers of the congressman's own devising.

The rigged character of the hearing is suggested by the lineup of witnesses. King did not invite a single one of the major Islamic-American or Arab-American organizations to participate. He summoned only one Muslim witness of any kind, an Arizona doctor and Republican Party activist who has branded the major Islamic-American groups as "extremist" for their opposition to government witch-hunting and to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Despite his claim that Muslim-American organizations and leaders have been a major obstacle to counterterrorism investigations, King was not able to find a single police or security official to testify to that effect.

The conservative Republican's personal bigotry has found expression in such statements as the claim, made to Sean Hannity of Fox News, that "80 to 85 percent of mosques in this country are controlled by Islamic fundamentalists," or, as he told the Associated Press last month, "There is a real threat to the country from the Muslim community, and the only way to get to the bottom of it is to investigate what is happening."

Particularly pernicious is King's effort to focus attention on the opposition of Muslim-American and Arab-American groups to government repression against their communities. He told Fox News Tuesday that he "will not back down whatsoever" to charges

that he is demonizing all American Muslims.

Citing the findings of Bush and Obama administration security officials, he claimed, "The threat analysis is that the danger comes from this small segment within the Muslim American community. And, unfortunately, not enough leaders in the Muslim community are willing to face up to that."

Democratic-controlled congressional committees have engaged in similar efforts to incite anti-Muslim sentiment, most notably by the Senate Homeland Security Committee, chaired by Independent Democrat Joseph Lieberman, which held 14 hearings on the subject, and the House Intelligence Committee, then chaired by Congresswoman Jane Harman, which held 6 hearings. Lieberman and Harman are retiring from Congress, and King has taken up the anti-Muslim banner following the Republican takeover of the House of Representatives.

The Republican congressman described the threat of Islamic fundamentalist terrorism as his main concern. "Al Qaeda has realized the difficulty it faces in launching attacks against our homeland from overseas," he told an interviewer Tuesday. "Thus it has adjusted its tactics and is now attempting to radicalize from within our country."

King has pointed to a supposedly growing threat from American-born Muslims or Muslim converts, citing the examples of Major Nidal Hasan, the Army psychiatrist of Palestinian descent who killed 13 soldiers in a rampage at Ft. Hood in November 2009, and Abdulhakim Mujahid Muhammad, born Carlos Bledsoe, an African-American convert to Islam who attacked an Arkansas military recruiting office, also in 2009, killing one soldier and wounding another.

The tendentious character of King's campaign is demonstrated by the fact that these two cases are the only such incidents of the past decade. During that same period, there have been hundreds of violent

attacks by Christian fundamentalists on abortion clinics and doctors, with at least half a dozen deaths. No House or Senate committee has held hearings on that subject.

King rejected suggestions from Muslim-American groups that he include witnesses about neo-Nazi and other right-wing extremists. He cited his communications with Obama administration officials such as Attorney General Eric Holder, who “is not saying he’s staying awake at night because of what’s coming from anti-abortion demonstrators or coming from environmental extremists or from Neo-Nazis. It’s the radicalization right now in the Muslim community.”

There was little initial media attention paid to King’s calling of the hearings, and a preliminary session in February, with Janet Napolitano, secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, received only perfunctory coverage. But in the last week, fueled in part by King’s own bigoted comments about Islam, there has been extensive media criticism.

On Tuesday alone, a *New York Times* editorial and two *Times* columns, as well as two columns in the *Washington Post*, assailed Thursday’s hearing as an exercise in scapegoating and religious intolerance.

A top Obama administration official, deputy national security adviser Denis McDonough, made a speech before a Muslim-American group in Falls Church, Virginia Tuesday in which he claimed, “In the United States of America, we don’t practice guilt by association.”

The Politico.com web site found a distinct lack of support for King’s hearing among House Republican leaders. A spokesman for Speaker John Boehner would say only that “Chairman King is chairman of the Homeland Security Committee,” and therefore entitled to call hearings, while Majority Whip Kevin McCarthy refused to comment.

The public concern expressed by security officials is that the well-publicized congressional witch-hunting will dry up sources of intelligence in the Muslim community. As McDonough put it in his speech Tuesday, “The bottom line is this: When it comes to preventing violent extremism and terrorism in the United States, Muslim Americans are not part of the problem, you’re part of the solution.”

There is undoubtedly a deeper concern, not publicly expressed, that King’s hearing is untimely given the upheavals in North Africa and the Middle East. The

spectacle of prominent US government figures demonizing Muslims will not make US efforts to manipulate events in the region any easier, nor facilitate the recruitment of Arabic-speaking CIA and military intelligence agents that American imperialism requires to spearhead its intervention.



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