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**In Theory: Rooting out Muslim- American radicals**

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Q. The Congressional hearings into the possible radicalization of Muslims in America has stirred emotions on both sides of the debate, with one Muslim-American representative leaving the room in tears after testifying about an American Muslim killed on 9/11.

The investigations, started by Rep. Pete King (R - NY), are designed to focus on what he believes is a rising domestic terror threat from American Muslims. He also wants to look into what he sees as a distinct lack of cooperation from the U.S. Islamic community.

King's hearings have become the subject of much debate, not only because he has little support from Congressional Republican leaders, but because he's been accused of being Joe McCarthy for the age of terrorism and of tarring all Muslims with the same brush. He's also been criticized for not investigating other possible domestic terrorists, such as survivalists, radical Christians, the Ku Klux Klan and neo-Nazis. Minnesota Democrat Keith Ellison said of King's plan, "It's like he's saying we're going to deal with drugs, but we're only going to deal with black drug dealers."

King is unrepentant and said, "There is nothing radical or un-American in holding these hearings." He has support from many within the law enforcement community and cites a Congressional Research Service report showing that authorities have made arrests in 22 alleged homegrown jihad-related terrorism plots since May 2009.

Is King right to hold these hearings? Is there a threat to the U.S. from American Muslims? And should the Islamic community do more to cooperate with law enforcement?

Answer:

Any time that the United States government begins to investigate a particular religious or racial group, there is the danger that prejudice and stereotyping will enter the picture. And that seems to be the case in the recent hearings by Representative Peter King.

As a student who actively participated in the Civil Rights movement in the South to gain justice for Afro-Americans in the '60s, I remember the same sort of blame leveled at "outside agitators" who had supposedly persuaded us to want things like equal educational opportunities and other benefits for our black brothers and sisters. One of the results of that kind of ethnocentric thinking was the killing of Unitarian Universalist minister, the Reverend James Reeb, and laywoman Viola Liuzzo in Selma, Alabama, by U.S. citizens who had not been "brain-washed" by members of some foreign religious group.

And certainly our tax dollars in this time of economic hardship could be more effectively spent on something other than this politically motivated hearing, particularly when this investigation has turned up no credible evidence of new plots by American Muslims. In fact there has been a great deal of information uncovered showing that potential threats have been foiled by Muslim Americans in a number of cases.

As people of faith, I believe we must stand against the type of stereotyping that makes people of minority religious or ethnic groups "other." I am convinced that loving and supporting our neighbors is much more effective and praiseworthy than alienating them.

The Rev. Dr. Betty Stapleford

Unitarian Universalist Church of the Verdugo Hills

La Crescenta

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No, in my opinion the American Muslim community is not a threat to national security. To quote my late father — and I'll clean this up a little bit for publication — there's an old saying that the more you stir a bucket of slop, the more it stinks.

Haven't we been through this already? I say, "Enough already!" Let's keep encouraging our national security people to keep up the good work, and if there are jihadists of any stripe, Muslim, Aryan Christian or Jewish Defense League extremists, run 'em in. But to target the whole Muslim population as possible terrorists does seem to me a bit extreme. We shouldn't be surprised at such tactics, however; after Pearl Harbor, anybody who looked Japanese was sent to an internment camp. Fear does that to people; it makes them react irrationally.

During the '50s, anybody who knew a Communist suffered mightily if the House Unamerican Activities Committee got wind of the fact. We Americans have some wonderful principles and a wonderful Constitution, including the first 10 amendments to the Constitution, which we call the Bill of Rights. But once fear enters the picture, we seem to throw all the principles out the window and anything or anyone who appears somehow "different" suffers for it.

We had Muslims living in this country long before 9/11, and those who weren't born here chose to come here. So how about a little respect for our fellow Americans who are working as hard as you are for their slice of the American dream? Are there some Muslim Americans who wish us ill? Certainly. But there are also plenty of the Aryan Brotherhood who'd like to see a few violent changes, too.

Peter King should be fair: If he's going to investigate all the Muslims, he ought to investigate all the white-only Christians, too.

The Rev. Skip Lindeman

La Cañada Congregational Church

United Church of Christ

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Perhaps I'm too much of a cynic, but I view many Congressional hearings as nothing more than publicity/photo opportunities for members of Congress. Representative King's motives may be genuine, but his hearings have the potential to be counterproductive. History has taught us that Congressional hearings targeting specific groups can threaten individual rights and freedoms.

At the same time, we need to be honest and acknowledge that we are facing a serious terrorist threat from radical Islam, a threat that is cultivating more and more adherents from within the United States.

The challenge is to balance individual rights and freedoms, including religious freedoms, with national security, which is not an easy task. Rather than spending time on hearings, I think it would be more productive for the United States government to develop more discrete and targeted strategies to deal with this threat. This would include developing better relationships within the Muslim communities here in the United States.

As for Muslims, they have been put into a difficult position. A vast majority of them are good citizens of the United States. It is the small majority that is the problem. How should the majority react to the minority? Should it cooperate with the United States Government in trying to eradicate this problem? Sure, but at what cost to the community? That decision can only be made by the leaders within that community, but that decision will have important consequences, both positive and negative.

For non-Muslim Americans, many of us do not have a good understanding of Islam and probably do not have many friends of that particular faith. Is it time for us to reach out to our Muslim neighbors and learn more about them and their culture? Yes.

History has taught us that overreaction to national security threats can compromise the principles upon which this country was built. Japanese internment camps in the 1940s are just one example of this. We must have the courage and wisdom to confront terrorism, but we must also have the courage and wisdom to not compromise our principles. Let us learn from history and not repeat it.

Rick Callister

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

La Cañada

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First of all, investigating domestic terrorism is exactly what I expect from our Congressional representatives. However, Rep. Peter King's hearings on March 10 were highly flawed and counterproductive for keeping our country safe. Much like the Japanese internment camps during WWII, which were a shameful setback in the efforts to fight Japanese imperialism, these hearings were rooted in fear and bigotry toward Muslim-Americans.

Let's deconstruct the errors and offer alternatives that will advance the cause of keeping our country safe from domestic terrorism. First of all, what was needed was real expert testimony on terrorism rather than the sad accounts of personal tragedy. Dr. Zuhdi Jasser was one of the so-called experts who gave testimony. While as a physician and a former lieutenant commander in the United States Navy and a staff physician to the U.S. Congress, he deserves our thanks for his service to our country; he is simply a political operative and not an expert on Islamic radicalization.

Alternatively, there are plenty of nationally recognized experts on terrorism from organizations such as the West Point Center on Terrorism or the Triangle Center on Terrorism and Homeland Security, which would have offered the right analysis and expertise on domestic terrorism. Instead, Rep. King used this issue as a political stunt; it took his Democratic counterparts to invite our own L.A. County Sheriff, Leroy Baca, to give expert testimony on how important the Muslim-Americans of our county and the nation are in the fight against domestic terrorism. Baca cited that seven of the last 10 plots propagated by Al-Qaeda within the United States were foiled by Muslims.

Another fundamental flaw of these hearings was the sole focus on Muslim-rooted extremism, which is no doubt a problem. The data as related by Baca indicates that there have been 77 total terror plots by domestic, non-Muslim perpetrators since 9/11. In comparison, there have been 41 total plots by both domestic and international Muslim perpetrators during the same period.

A comprehensive approach to domestic terrorism would unite Americans more for a common cause. Richard Alan Clarke, a longtime counter-terrorism analyst for three Republican presidential administrations, testified that "to the extent that these hearings make American Muslims feel that they are the object of fear-mongering, it

will only serve Al Qaeda's ends.”

This segues into my last point. Terrorism knows no religion, and the Muslim-American community is not the enemy, but rather the single most effective weapon in the fight against domestic terrorism. We must reject the “burn the haystack to find the needle” approach toward Muslim-Americans in the fight to protect our great country.

Levent Akbarut

Islamic Congregation

of La Cañada Flintridge

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I believe that ending U.S. military attacks, manned and unmanned, on Muslim countries would be a much better way to reduce threats to our security from American Muslims than Rep. King's hearings.

Roberta Medford

Atheist

Montrose

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Radical Islam has proven to be a very real and prominent threat to Americans at home and abroad. No other group has murdered as many people in America as it did on 9/11. We have seen numerous examples of the infiltration and infection of Islam in America and other countries by radical extremists. So, to ignore the problem or to give lesser threats more attention would be the height of irresponsibility.

Investigations led by Rep. King very easily turn into “witch hunts,” to be sure, but inactivity in such cases leads to the deaths of innocent people.

Muslims and all other people of faith must take responsibility and be diligent to keep their doctrine free from corruption by mankind’s universal proclivity to sin. Paul told Timothy that false teachers’ “talk will spread like gangrene” (2 Timothy 2:17). Jesus told His disciples, “Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees” (Matthew 16:6). He said, “Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.”

Of course, if the very core of one’s faith is in error, it’s time to forsake falsehood and move on to the truth. Ephesians 4:21 tells us that “truth is in Jesus.” Jesus himself said, “Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice” (John 18:37). He even said, “I am...the truth” (John 14:6). Falsehood and spiritual darkness always lead to destruction. Jesus Christ came so that all who follow Him would have life abundantly.

Pastor Jon Barta

Valley Baptist Church

Burbank

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If it came to light that Christians were disproportionately plotting and carrying out terrorist activities, wouldn't it be sensible to investigate such a situation? We could object and cite some instances of civic-minded Christians that help little old ladies across the street, but that really wouldn't answer whether or not society should be worried about dozens of groups secretly meeting to serve up divine wrath in the name of Jesus.

The case here is that Muslims are under scrutiny because this scenario currently applies to them. If there's no problem, nothing should turn up in the investigation, right? It's like being pulled over by a cop and letting him open the trunk. If there's nothing in there, why worry about his looking? The officer looks, says "Thank you, drive safely," and off you go. Now, what if something is in there, something of yours or maybe something you're holding for someone else? Houston, we have a problem.

I think that's what the worry is, and we need to look in the trunk. What I find ironic is that the investigation has been criticized for possibly inciting a domestic terror attack. But wouldn't that all the more justify such an investigation? Who would be incited?

America's worries would evaporate if Muslims here would get more aggressive in condemning and rooting out the rats who bring reproach upon their group. Sometimes we hear a Muslim leader denounce an instance of terrorism, but we don't hear it with megaphones or as a united Muslim voice. "Sometimes terrorism is justified," Muslims say, or "9/11 was a government plot." We hear of fatwā coming from the Middle Eastern muftis who condemn and even put a price on the heads of authors and cartoonists who dare criticize Mohammed, but when do American muftis ever counter from here with a "back-atcha?"

Every Easter, the godless opponents of Christ come out to deny his resurrection. We don't put contracts out on such people. Those are the sort Christ died to save, and they still have hope while they breathe, as does every neighbor — even Muslims. Love them.

Rev. Bryan Griem

Montrose Community Church

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The simple fact that Mr. King's own party hardly supports his hearings is proof positive that there really was little point in holding them. We all know that congressional hearings generate media chatter for a short while and usually accomplish little more. I suspect that Mr. King's primary intent was not so much to secure our nation but to please his political base by creating an international commotion. (And since Mr. King is also on record as an ardent supporter of the IRA before the group renounced terror attacks and joined the political process, he is a rather flawed messenger for an anti-terror campaign.)

I truly believe that the overwhelming majority of American Muslims are good, law-abiding citizens who want this country to grow and prosper in peace. Nevertheless, the fact remains that there are some radicalized Muslims who hold US citizenship and are determined to destroy our democratic way of life. In the past few years, we have witnessed firsthand how some of these "home-grown" fanatics have tried to create havoc in our urban centers. Less than a year ago, an American Muslim, Faisal Shahzad, tried setting off a car-bomb in Times Square. Shahzad's lack of remorse and inflammatory statements in court — as he was being sentenced to life in prison — are chilling to the bone.

I feel that so long as there are people like Shahzad among them, the Muslim community will have to bear the burden of acting above and beyond the letter of the law. It will need to ensure that any form of radicalism is quickly eradicated from its midst, and those imams or leaders who preach hate or intolerance of any kind are thoroughly ostracized. The Muslim community should create an environment that entirely rejects extremism

and makes those who seek to perpetuate terrorism unwelcome. By doing so, it will ensure that the theatrics of legislators like Peter King will be perceived by all Americans as truly meaningless.

Rabbi Simcha Backman

Chabad Jewish Center

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You get the feeling that people are slowly backing away from Peter King – his previous Muslim friends, his Republican colleagues and most certainly his Democratic colleagues. Democratic Senator Dick Durbin initiated his own set of hearings in order to present Muslim-Americans as a community facing growing discrimination and intolerance. Assuming that Rep. King is earnest in his motives and not simply hate-mongering to win votes, you have to assume that he will eventually have to ask himself why this work of biased “fact-finding” is so lonely. Is he taking an important stand against domestic terrorism, or just misusing his congressional authority to bully and threaten?

Politico reports that at the Durbin hearings, the Justice Department testified that since the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, the department has investigated more than 800 possible hate crimes against people perceived to be Muslim or Arab. As people of faith, let’s take a stand on that. We already have plenty of history to inform us of what happens when we begin to demonize or de-humanize a particular group of people. With so many people backing away from Rep. King – calling him McCarthy and recalling the shameful WWII imprisonment of our Japanese-American neighbors – I have a little hope that we, as a country, are remembering what that slippery slope feels like.

So, Rep. King, please let the first in the series of hearings be the last. Find effective ways to combat domestic terrorism (how about a little gun control?), and let your Catholicism inform your politics with wisdom, grace and recognition of the sacred worth of every God-created human.

The Rev. Paige Eaves

Crescenta Valley United Methodist Church