

November 23, 2007

Honorable Raymond Kelly
Police Commissioner of NYPD
One Police Plaza
New York, NY 10038

Community Statement on NYPD Radicalization Report

Dear Commissioner Kelly:

We as community members, leaders, and imams find the recently released New York Police Department (“NYPD”) report, *Radicalization in the West: the Home Grown Threat* (“Report”) to be unrepresentative, misleading and harmful for police-community relations in New York City. Relying upon a small sample of case studies, the Report does not carefully delineate or adequately distinguish between mainstream Muslims and those who may become “radicalized.” Instead, it reinforces negative stereotypes and renders every day actions of devout Muslims as potential precursors of terrorism and indicators of threat.

Additionally, the Report does not explain at what threshold political and religious expression leads to surveillance by law enforcement and overlooks a consideration that unpopular political opinion may be considered protected speech. The uncertainty attached to its implementation in the field leads to fears that misuse is possible, especially given the ongoing profiling concerns in the African American community, as well as the present political context for Muslims. In effect, the Report appears to support unwarranted suspicion of every day Muslims and consequently contributes to already widespread private and public stereotyping of Islam and its adherents.

Equally problematic is the fact that the Report omits the contributions made by Muslims in upholding national security through community-based initiatives, including the Muslim community’s contributions to fighting terrorism in New York City and its ongoing cooperation with the NYPD. Testimony provided by the Report’s co-author Mr. Silber and Asst. Commissioner Sanchez at the recent Senate Homeland Security hearing similarly omitted the Muslim role in combating extremism, including the Muslim community’s numerous and ongoing interfaith dialogue efforts, which for some have been ongoing for decades. The overall effect of these omissions is to present erroneously the whole Muslim community as a barrier to national security.

We are further troubled that this Report is already being used on a national scale, in congressional hearings and by other police departments to inform legislation and initiatives by other police departments. Indeed, widespread circulation of it may contribute to greater infringement on and restriction of freedom of religion, assembly, expression and other constitutional rights.

Below we describe issues of specific concern including three overarching questions. We then identify problems with the Report's methodology and evidence; conclusions and policy implications; and impact on police-community relations. Notwithstanding the importance of studying "radicalism," the Report's shortcomings render it an ineffective tool and even potentially harmful for homeland security and for police-community relations. Accordingly, we respectfully request clarification and responses from the NYPD on the questions and concerns noted below.

I. **Key Questions:**

- a) What concrete steps and specific initiatives will the NYPD promote to implement the findings of this Report and make New York a more secure city without unfairly profiling Muslims?
- b) What diagnostic and policy lessons has the NYPD drawn and how will it factor in sensitivity to the impact of this Report on the larger community?
- c) How can NYPD address specific concerns we raise below regarding evidence, methodology, policy implications and police-community relations?

II. **Areas of Concern:**

A. Methodology

- The Report draws its inferences from a small data set, which makes its conclusions unreliable.
- We would like to know about the qualifications and the background of the authors of this Report, and factors used to select experts contributing to this Report.
- The methodology section states that the NYPD met with law enforcement, intelligence officials and academics in the various locations to help them better understand the data gathered. Yet these meetings and conversations are not referenced in the footnotes.
- The case-study method is well-suited for inductive approaches, but as acknowledged in the Report, one must be careful to apply findings across countries and cultures. Yet, even while highlighting the importance of environment and acknowledging that European and American socio-economic conditions for mobility are different, the analysis nonetheless applies findings and a model developed from European examples to the United States.
- Case studies are based on plots that came to notice of media, and may not be representative of actual terror plots that have gone undetected. Moreover these studies are uncritically used to illustrate several points of the thesis of Radicalization. For example, the Report uses the case studies to show how the role of a senior member of a group can indeed serve to sanction criminal or terrorist activity. However it is not noted

that in several case studies cited, this role was played by an informer affiliated with a law enforcement agency, a fact that may undercut the purity of the evidence. More information on theories of group psycho-dynamics might help the Report have greater depth. How do other case histories not mentioned in the Report compare?

- The vast majority of footnotes refer not to scholarly articles or books, but to news coverage of terrorism cases. Such coverage is often perceived by Muslims to be biased. References to anti-Muslim and Islamophobic publications and websites such as Militant Islam Monitor suggest that the analysis seems to be taking an existing a priori model generated by media and right wing sources, measuring it against five cases in Europe, and then “testing” it against U.S. based cases (p. 15).

B. Evidence

- “Typical signatures” of radicalization noted in the Report include giving up cigarettes, becoming regular with prayers, wearing traditional dress, expressing concern for Muslims involved in conflicts overseas, becoming involved with community issues, and activism. None of these are *necessarily* indicators of what the Report characterizes as the “Salafi-Jihadi interpretation.” (p. 31, pp. 16-18). Nor are they exclusively indicators of the “self-identification” phase. To the contrary, these behaviors are considered desirable for many Muslims, and the vast majority of people who practice these behaviors are peaceful law-abiding citizens.
- Unsubstantiated statements that incorporate quantitative language, i.e., “logarithmic rate” (p. 9), “permeates,”(p. 66) “many Muslims in the West” and “most widely exposed to” (p. 17), “thousands of extremist websites and chat rooms” (p. 20), and “accelerating in terms of how long it takes, and individuals are getting younger” (p. 84). There is no indication of how these statements were derived; no quantitative data is shared. Further, these statements are out of sync with evidence of different rates of radicalization and numbers in Europe and America.
- Inconsistencies within the Report: for example, in the pre-radicalization stage, individuals in the case studies were presented as integrated, through their profession, education, and socially; they were actually not living in an “isolated” or “pure” “environments” or “enclaves,” factors which are suggested to make a community “vulnerable to be penetrated by extremism (p. 22).” Another example is the confusing and negative presentation about the role of mosques: for instance, certain mosques are stated to be as an important place of indoctrination into “radical Salafi” ideology, but then individuals are said to withdraw from the mosque to radicalize even further.
- Moreover, many Muslim readers object to inappropriate use of Arabic terminology, such as “jihad,” and combining terms such as “salafi-jihadi.” There are many differences even among Muslims about how these terms are used, and the Report does not attend to these nuances. Neither a definition of the term “jihad,” nor an acknowledgment of its broader meaning are offered anywhere in the text. The lack of sensitivity to broader and varied uses of the term is reflected in the de facto criminalization of the term jihad, by

using the terminology, “commit jihad” (pp. 43, 46, 47, 51, 52, 56, 62, 63, 66, and 73) as if the term “jihad” describes a form of a criminal conduct—which is plainly incorrect.

- Mere exposure to literature by Maududi and Qutb cannot be a “signifier” of radicalization. Similarly, certain indicators, such as engaging in group outdoor activities or wilted plants in windows are hardly indicators of radicalization. Additional factors identified as “triggers,” such as unemployment, racism, and personal experiences such as death or separation in close relationships are widely experienced and transcended across all ethnic groups. In pointing to commonly available facts, the Report licenses police to use their discretion in ways that seem to inevitably target Muslims.
- Admittedly, the Report does disavow profiling. But the evidence presented in the Report logically leads to the conclusion that long-term surveillance of the Muslim community at large is warranted. This conclusion, in turn raises questions about the use of the Report as a tool in developing policies.

C. Conclusions and policy implications

- There are not enough caveats to prevent profiling.
- No concrete suggestions are presented for how to address and prevent radicalization. But the Report is crafted in such a way as to make community-wide measures likely.
- There is no clarity about how the NYPD plans to use this Report to advance security, at which level of the “funnel” (p. 84) surveillance will be directed and the role for community-police coordination and partnerships. Rather, the community is treated as a part of the problem, not the solution.
- In all cases examined in the Report, groups became politicized as a result of perceived injustice in international conflicts involving the Muslim community. Yet the Report does not weigh the international conflicts any more than personal crises, and reduces the problem to a “search for identity” (p. 82). Such an approach overlooks the numerous efforts of Muslims to address foreign policy concerns through constructive, non-violent approaches as well as teachings in Islam to practice concern for the welfare of other Muslims around the world.

D. Police-community relations

- Research, such as that conducted by the Vera Institute, and police-community programs in NYC and around the country show that police departments are most successful in their work when they have a culturally sensitive approach and establish positive relations with the communities they serve. Will the NYPD implement meaningful and effective cultural sensitivity trainings for its employees to help them with their work with diverse Muslims?
- The Report does not specify how the analysis and conclusions drawn fit within the larger context of NYPD relations with Muslims: what changes will it implement in its current

approach to the community, and how will it work with the community to prevent “radicalization” and collect intelligence?

In conclusion, we hope that the NYPD will answer our concerns, make relevant adjustments to the Report as suggested by Commissioner Kelly at the last meeting, and ultimately redress the loss of trust engendered by its publication.

We look forward to establishing an ongoing and structured dialogue with the NYPD on these issues, initiate programs that further community-police partnerships, and ultimately support greater engagement with efforts that will help Muslim communities as well as all New Yorkers to be more secure.