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Public Facing Advocacy Writing

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Governments Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Approach Continues to Single Out Muslims

By CAIR Government Affairs Coordinator Amineh Safi (aSafi@cair.com)

Last week, the U.S. House Oversight and Government Reform Committee held a congressional hearing examining the governments policy for countering violent extremism (CVE) domestically.

Disappointingly, like the federal governments overall CVE program, the oversight committee singled out the American Muslim community as the sole focus of its countering violent extremism hearing.

The committees credibility on CVE was also called into question by its invitation of Raheel Raza as an expert witness. In her writings, Raza frequently promotes a deep distrust of all Muslims and Islamic houses of worship.

In 2014, Raza published an [open letter](#) calling for the closure of all mosques for three months to have intensive scrutiny on the Imams and their sermons. This is similar to Donald Trumps call for surveillance of American mosques.

Raza also urged a ban on immigration to Canada from Muslim countries till matters settle down. That was a year before Trumps notorious call for a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States until our countrys representatives can figure out what is going on.

As a federal program intended to counter violent extremism within the United States, CVEs primary focus on the Muslim community cannot be justified. In 2013, the Center for Research on Globalization [found](#) that between 1980 and 2005, only six percent of terrorist attacks carried out on U.S. soil were committed by Muslims.

More recently, researchers at Georgia State University [remarked](#) that Muslims carried out only 11 out of the 89 attacks, yet those attacks received 44 percent of the media coverage. (Meanwhile, 18 attacks actually targeted Muslims in America).

Alternatively, the committee could have focused on why the Department of Homeland Security spent millions of taxpayer dollars on a program that has exclusively targeted American Muslims. Similarly, they could have discussed reports that the Trump administration is considering rebranding CVE to Countering Islamic Extremism or Countering Radical Islamic Extremism, placing a disproportionate emphasis on acts carried out by Muslims in comparison to other perpetrators.

It is important to note that no American community, its politics or religious beliefs should be placed under government scrutiny, or blacklisted.

From its inception, the underlying goal of the CVE program has been to gain access to, surveil and collect information on the American Muslim community. This motive was exposed by the [Trump administrations withdrawal of CVE funds](#) from projects that do not focus on Muslims and where law-enforcement is not involved.

When the vice chair of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, Steve Russell, asked Kerry Sleeper, the assistant director for the Office of Partner Engagement at the FBI, and George Selim, the former leader of the CVE Task Force, to offer a profile of a typical terrorist, both Sleeper and Selim were [unable to provide one](#).

Their response was not surprising given that Britains MI5 intelligence agency, which has engaged in CVE measures prior to the United States, [concluded](#) in 2008 that it is not possible to draw up a typical profile of the British terrorist as most are demographically unremarkable.

In another 2010 [report](#), titled Preventing Violent Extremism, the British Commons Communities and Local Government Committee concluded that, there has been a pre-occupation with the theological basis of radicalization, when the evidence seems to indicate that politics, policy and socio-economics may be more important factors in the process.

So how do we move forward?

The removal of monitoring and surveillance of the Muslim community would help rebuild trust between law enforcement and federal agencies and would re-empower the community to tackle internal issues openly and without fear.

Moreover, public dialogue addressing U.S. foreign policy choices must take place. Micah Zenko of the Council on Foreign Relations [notes](#) that while there are CVE discussions in policy-making circles, there is rarely any consideration of which U.S. foreign policy activities might themselves be precursors to U.S. terrorism.

The media should strive to present crimes in proportion to their occurrence, regardless of the perpetrators. The Georgetown Bridge Initiative has [found](#) that, Western media coverage of Islam has been almost exclusively negative, and Islam is portrayed differently than other religions with virtually no positive coverage.

Scholars at the University of Illinois note that in media reports about domestic terrorism, Muslims were mentioned in 81 percent of stories, when they only accounted for six percent of attacks. Such coverage results in a [disproportionate sense of threat](#) from the Muslim community.

While it is uncertain how President Trump will carry out CVE programming, we know that the problematic methods of information gathering, policing and monitoring of Muslim communities and their houses of worship will remain. George Selim's recent resignation following the committee hearing is cause for alarm. It signals the Trump administration's possible termination of outreach efforts to address the Muslim community's concerns.

All those who value the First Amendment right to practice one's faith freely and without persecution must oppose any policies that single out a particular religious group.

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