

SENATE



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THE SPECIAL SENATE COMMITTEE ON ANTI-TERRORISM

EVIDENCE

OTTAWA, Monday, October 4, 2010

The Special Senate Committee on Anti-terrorism met this day at 1 p.m. to examine matters relating to anti-terrorism.

Senator Hugh Segal (*Chair*) in the chair.

The Chair: Colleagues, welcome. This is the eighth meeting of the Standing Senate Committee on Anti-terrorism of the Third Session of the Fortieth Parliament of Canada.

As we await legislation from the House of Commons, we continue our inquiry into the changing nature of the terrorist threat in Canada. Today we have two parts to our meeting; first, a panel with two specialists in research on anti-terrorism, and second, a presentation from a community leader on a 12-step de-radicalization program going on in Toronto.

I would like to introduce our guests.

The Chair: We are fortunate to have with us Sayyid Ahmed Amiruddin, who is the chairman and founder of Al Sunnah Foundation of Canada and vice-president of the Islamic Supreme Council of Canada. In 2006, he founded the concept of a systematic de-radicalization program as a radicalization program initiative in Canada in response to the 2006 Toronto 18 terror plot. His program is specifically tailored to undermine the ideological underpinnings of extremist ideology. Over 50 mosques and Islamic organizations throughout Canada have since privately endorsed his de-radicalization program to their congregations. Today he will share with us the main components of the 12-step program, and he has agreed to take some questions.

I want to welcome our guest here today. Much of our testimony today has been about how to analyze what is happening and how to assist with policing and coordination. Our guest is one Canadian who is working to prevent bad things from happening, and I think his advice and insights will be of immense value to our committee.

Mr. Amiruddin, I give you the floor.



Sayyid Ahmed Amiruddin, Chairman, Al Sunnah Foundation: Thank you. Canadians have been painfully confronted with the fact that some Canadians born and raised here, or raised here, are receptive to extremist propaganda and manipulation. As we know, a number of them underwent a radicalization process and were successfully recruited for the "jihad against Canada," with the ultimate prospect of martyrdom.

These groups of individuals, who pose an imminent threat to our national security, were effectively radicalized over a period of time through a wide variety of means but, from what I know, mostly through the widely available Internet-based al Qaeda propaganda.

The court hearings from the Toronto 18 case specifically reveal that the group in the 2006 Toronto 18 case was inspired by al Qaeda propaganda while residing in Mississauga and the GTA.

The threat represented by al Qaeda-inspired extremism in Canada, as we know, has grown into a considerable and permanent external and homegrown threat. From a couple of specific cases back in 2003 and 2004 -- that of Mansour Jabarah and Momin Khwaja, for example -- to the arrests of the Toronto 18 group in 2006, it has appeared that a process of radicalization is definitely present here in Canada.

Much different from the Israeli-Palestinian equation, the radicalization process of Western-raised individuals is not triggered by oppression, perceived suffering, revenge or desperation; rather, this radicalization is motivated specifically by ideology.

The 9/11 Commission Report, one of the earliest reliable texts on this issue, reports on page 362 that:

Usama Bin Laden and other Islamist terrorist leaders draw on a long tradition of extreme intolerance within one stream of Islam (a minority tradition) from at least Ibn Taimiyya, through the founders of Wahabism . . . That stream is motivated by religion and does not distinguish politics from religion, thus distorting both . . . With it there is no common ground -- not even respect for life -- on which to begin a dialogue.

The jihadi-Salafi ideology is the driver that radicalizes --

The Chair: Mr. Amiruddin, if I could ask you to slow down a little bit. Our translators are working hard to catch every word, so if you can slow down a tiny bit, that would be of great assistance. Thank you so much.



Mr. Amiruddin: The jihadi, or the Salafi-jihadist, ideology is the ideology that drives young men and women born and raised in the West to carry out "autonomous jihad" via acts of terrorism against their home countries. While many followers of this particular stream of Islam may not directly advocate jihad via acts of terrorism, or may even condemn terrorism wholly, the fact remains that this is the only stream within the Islamic tradition that is directly conducive to the radicalization process and the sanctioning of "autonomous jihad" via acts of terrorism.

The Salafi ideology has served as the inspiration for numerous homegrown groups, including the Madrid 2004 bombers, Amsterdam's Hofstad Group, London's July 2005 bombers and specifically the Toronto 18 group arrested in 2006.

In 2005, prior to the arrests of the Toronto 18 group, our foundation carried out a detailed survey on radicalization and homegrown extremism in Canada. We shared our concerns with authorities and community leaders in order to get a better understanding out to them of the potential and imminent threat posed by homegrown radicalization. In 2006, with the arrests of the Toronto 18 group, our concerns proved to be true.

We found that in order to create and sustain effective de-radicalization strategies, there are three main components in this process of counterterrorism. First is the prevention of radicalization through fostering committed partnerships with expert groups within given communities who are working towards the de-legitimization of violent extremism; second is the proliferation of an integral cultural counter-narrative in the context of being Canadian; and third is the integration of people at the individual, social and political level.

Our foundation focuses particular attention to the following priority in the specific context of supporting de-radicalization and preventing radicalization: We are committed to identifying the causes, drivers and means of radicalization and proactively craft strategies and plans to diffuse and/or ideally eliminate these subversive and severely destructive elements within at-risk cultural communities. We have devised a systematic de-radicalization strategy, or program. Our strategy focuses primarily on the psycho-spiritual development and ideological rehabilitation of at-risk youth. We achieve this through our 12-step program.

I had initially submitted a handout, which will be given after this presentation. Because of the amount of information in the handout, there was not enough time to translate it.

Through our 12-step program, from the get-go, or step 1, individuals are made aware of the theological, ethical and legal aspects of their own culture pertaining to clarifying the beliefs, states



and actions that give rise to extremism and are empowered with knowledge of psycho-spiritual perfecting paradigms within their own culture. By the time an individual completes the 12 steps of our program, the traces and vestiges of extremism are wholly uprooted from them.

We have implemented this program in two levels... The success of our implementation strategy is based on a group of professionals and experts that we deal with in order to implement our strategy. These various groups are outlined in that bigger document, which you will have access to after this meeting.

For example we have medical practitioners as advisers in the implementation of our program, such as psychologists and psychiatrists, who can provide guidance and advice on medical and other factors which may be enablers in the radicalization process, which may be surprising to many. Specifically, dealing with hyper-religiosity, which is a diagnosed system of bi-polar disorder treated with prescription drugs.

We have identified academic advisers and we have social workers who give us an idea of social issues which may be driving individuals down that path of radicalization. We have established effective community relationships with clergy and with interfaith leaders to give us better leverage and to put us in a better position to deal with input from community members.

...We have also come up with an evaluation plan. Specifically, we hope to achieve, through the implementation of our de-radicalization strategy throughout Canada, deterrence in radicalization and terrorism overall, related to our cultural group in specific, an increased dialogue in the rejection of terrorism, and we aim at rejection of the drivers behind the radicalization process as well within our community. We also aim at the decrease in anti-Semitism, which we found to be a main driver in radicalization of individuals, both on the right, as we are discussing in the U.S., for example, and also those who are motivated by al-Qaeda-inspired extremism.

We also aim at reducing anti-Western, anti-secular jihadist sentiments within our community, and we expect an increase in the popularity of the relevant counter-narrative, specifically aimed at delegitimizing the ideology which drives young men and women, raised in this part of the world, to carry out acts of terrorism against their countries.

Last, but not least, we aim to increase participation in our democratic process of individuals from our community.



We must look specifically at Canadian Muslims as we are dealing with radicalization in the context of al-Qaeda-inspired extremism. What we will be able to note is that Canadian Muslims actually represent the largest growing denomination in Canada with a population growth rate, according to Statistics Canada, of 128.9 per cent since 1991.

...What we feel is happening, ...is that there is a growing trend, within our community and within the rest of the mainstream community, which I feel is destroying the harmony of our multi-cultural society in that there is an epidemic rise in mistrust between 3 per cent of our population and the rest of Canada, each of whom are beginning to view each other as "the other."

A good example of that is Senator Smith's experience on the plane that he spoke about when he was nervous and, as soon as that individual did what he did, his discomfort left him.

...We feel our program is a logical solution to cutting costs in domestic counter-terrorism, and a solution to prevent radicalization in at-risk communities, as we have already demonstrated. Simply put, our program works.

...We look forward to establishing a relationship with authorities, as we already have in the past, and maintaining that in order to support our program, which we are confident will save lives and is of benefit to all Canadians. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, and I will open the floor to questions.

...**Senator Joyal:** I was listening to you, and I could not but think that the religious factor is an important one for some people who are more receptive to a religious message than to a political message, per se, for the reasons that you will easily understand.

Effectively, if we have to address that fact, how could we answer the need to prevent indoctrination on the basis of the interpretation of religious beliefs that lead to jihad?

Mr. Amiruddin: We specifically look at the opinions of experts in this field. They have specifically identified, within the Islamic tradition, for example, one particular stream of Islam which does not necessarily call towards terrorist acts or terrorism for that matter, but is conducive to the radicalization process.

A way that we would be able to perhaps implement that, in the context of the Canadian Muslim community, for example, is while not directly getting involved in the religious affairs of the



community, make programs available for organizations that are proliferating a counter-narrative which is more conducive to being a well-integrated Canadian and something which supports our concept of democracy within the context of being Canadian.

Senator Joyal: If I recall, on the story of the background information that was released with the 18 groups of people in the incident that we know of, most of them had been regulars at the mosque where the imam was preaching to a point almost of resorting to violence. How do we monitor -- or can we -- within the framework of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, that recognizes the freedom of religion, and prevent that kind of belief from being spread to persons who are more vulnerable than others because they are younger, generally, and more susceptible to being convinced by those calls?

In contrast, we have a person with a certain level of maturity -- as you have heard from our earlier witnesses today -- whereby a person who has grown up, let us say 45 or 50 years old, has seen life in a different perspective and is less susceptible to being convinced or to answer to a call to jihad. That seems to me to be the conundrum of the situation.

Mr. Amiruddin: I think that, in specific, if we adopt the best global policies or practices used by our allies throughout the world, we would not have to be so concerned with necessarily reinventing the wheel on how to deal with this issue.

Canada, like other Western democracies, has a number of rights that are available to its citizens in regard to freedom of religion and speech. However, in this particular context of al Qaeda-inspired extremism we must see that, while we are very much interested in being politically correct and keeping up the rights of our fellow citizens, which we should be, the fact remains that some individuals exposed to one particular type of indoctrination are pulled or drawn toward radicalization. That process specifically is, in my understanding, almost the catalyst in that process which turns a thoroughly indoctrinated individual into an aspiring terrorist and is not even something that they would learn at mosques, rather it is the widely available Internet propaganda.

I can visit YouTube, for example, and view videos of al Qaeda propaganda from Russia and all over the world. From my understanding and my insight into the Toronto 18 group and the other groups that I have looked at, the best solution for us to actually prevent that final stage in the radicalization process, which has been identified as jihadization, is to come up with some sort of system where we would really come up with some sort of a strategy to prevent al Qaeda propaganda from entering our country and being viewed. It would be similar to how we prevent



people from viewing child pornography or different things which are unacceptable to us as a society. Something which would lead to the fourth stage of the radicalization process, which is what we know as jihadization, where individuals would be motivated to carry out acts of terrorism against their fellow citizens, should not be allowed into the country in the first place.

On an international level we have to see specifically what we are facing. In Canada we have many initiatives within our community. We have gone out of our way to prove to fellow Canadians that we do not accept this type of thinking, that we reject it.

For example, our organization, the Islamic Supreme Council of Canada, and also our foundation, issued a fatwa earlier this year condemning terrorism again, in addition to what has been going on since 9/11. Another Canadian Muslim imam, Sheik Tahir-ul-Qadri, who recently migrated here from Pakistan, issued a 600-page fatwa against terrorism stating explicitly to young men and women that those calling to acts of terrorism are not calling toward the Islamic understanding of paradise, but rather are inviting them towards hell.

We are rejecting that ideology and mindset in whatever way we can, but we are limited because we are community-based organizations. What we are faced with is really the difficulty in breaking the legitimacy that this ideology currently carries, due to its monopoly at the heart of the Islamic world in the Middle East, without specifically giving names of countries.

This ideology, which has been found as the root or the driver behind the radicalization of young men and women in the West, and particularly in Canada, enjoys a very strong legitimacy throughout the Muslim world and even in Canada. My organization is faced with a severe obstacle when we attempt to de-legitimize it because of the monopoly that particular ideology enjoys in the heart of the Muslim world.

Perhaps another initiative we could take is have members from our government work with their counterparts in the Middle East, and specifically that one country which is responsible for the proliferation of this ideology and try to perhaps even work towards breaking the monopoly of that one particular group in the heart of the Muslim world. This is not because we are interested in the affairs of what religion is being practiced in a different country or otherwise, but one must keep in mind that every year, for example, over 4,000 Canadians visit that same country for a pilgrimage.

What we are concerned with is what they are coming back with and what they are being indoctrinated with. It does not mean that every person going to that one country for that pilgrimage, greater or lesser, is being indoctrinated, but they are being exposed to that ideology.



That ideology is enjoying strong legitimacy within the relevant cultural group because of that monopoly. That would be an important part of deterring or preventing radicalization.

The Chair: We have a fair number of senators who want to ask questions, so I would like to thank you very much.

Senator Tkachuk: The Nazis and the Communists, to me, were the greatest terrorists of the 20th century. They had enemies. The Nazis did not like the Jews and the Communists did not like the capitalists.

Who is the enemy of extreme terrorists?

Mr. Amiruddin: The enemy of the extreme terrorists, in specific, are those individuals opposed to their world view and their ideal world model for a government. They are calling toward the revival of the Caliphate, similar to what was present during the time of the Ottoman Empire, but ironically the government they are calling toward, this world government, actually is very different from the model from the Ottoman time. Therefore, their enemies are anyone who stands in the way of this global call.

In Afghanistan, what we fail to point out repeatedly -- as I see in media -- is that the legitimacy that the jihad against western soldiers and against Hamid Karzai's government enjoys is specifically drawn from the fact that they have appointed a leader, Mullah Omar, to be the Caliph of this worldwide Caliphate. They see themselves as soldiers of Mullah Omar's Caliphate, fighting to establish this government in Afghanistan, and they looked at expanding that into the central Asian region and different parts of the world which then would join into this Caliphate.

Senator Tkachuk: In your 12-step program it seems that the most successful and dramatic, the coal incident and 9/11, and many others that are quite public, involved suicide bombers. We deal with them in Afghanistan and the Americans deal with them in Iraq. How do you deal with that? How do you deal with that as part of your program, that a parent would let his child -- do you know what I mean? To me, it just seems so beyond anything that I just do not know. How do you deal with that thought process when you are dealing with imams or groups that would be spreading this kind of belief?

Mr. Amiruddin: That is the most important component of our program, which is the de-legitimatization of the ideology which is really conducive to that radicalization process, and would lead one to legitimize acts of terrorism. Part of our strategy and part of the strategy of



counter-narrative groups throughout the world that are working with their own governments or with different governments in the world against the al Qaeda call to terrorism, inspired by al Qaeda, specifically focus or aim at de-legitimizing the ideology that would make it permissible.

...These are individuals who are very particular and devout to their faith. How would you get someone from being so devout and devoted to their faith and forging piety to, justifying in their hearts and minds, to carry out a suicide attack against their fellow citizens?

This is where the world community of experts on terrorism has come to conclude that this process is specifically motivated by ideology. In our 12-step program, the way we address that is by de-legitimizing the ideology which justifies these types of attacks, making them impermissible, making individuals understand that, from an Islamic -- because this is the community we are speaking of -- point of view, acts like this do not carry one to paradise, as promised to them by their al Qaeda leaders or by different groups that radicalize them. Rather, they are leading them straight to where they do not wish to go, which, in the Islamic or religious context, would be hell.

Senator Furey: Thank you very much for coming today. I want to begin by congratulating you on your program. I think it is an excellent program. I agree, I certainly feel that it is a logical solution to preventing radicalization. When I look at the implementation through mass communication, working with the school system and training public officials, it appears to me that it is geared toward just that: prevention.

Does it work, or what, if anything, works on young men and women who have already bought into the jihad/Salafi ideology and have gone over to the dark side? Is there any hope for those, or are we just looking at prevention on a go-forward basis?

Mr. Amiruddin: When dealing with individuals who are radicalized, again, I will refer to the four stages of radicalization. If we are talking about individuals who are in the first or second stage, which would be the pre-radicalization stage and the self-identification stage where they are beginning to explore the Salafist ideology, or even at the third stage where they are indoctrinated thoroughly, if we can reach out to them through our de-radicalization strategy and really work at shifting their thought process and working at de-legitimizing the legitimacy of carrying out suicide attacks, then we would be effective.

However, individuals who have really crossed past that third stage of radicalization and they are ready -- they are consuming al Qaeda propaganda from the Internet and they are ready to carry out attacks at the right moment when the opportunity strikes -- are not individuals we see ourselves as



having the capacity or the resources to really intervene with. We hope that our national security apparatus and the international efforts against terrorism would be more effective in dealing with that.

Senator Smith: How many people have actually completed your program, and how you define completion? Do they go to a certain number of classes, are there focus groups or are there exams or a paper they have to write? What are the criteria for completing the program and how many have completed it? Are there any examples of how it has been successful?

Mr. Amiruddin: Definitely there are. To date, since 2006, we have a little over 200 individuals who have completed our 12-step program. That program was not marketed to them specifically as, "Here are the 12 steps. You are a radical and we want to de-radicalize you." That would not work and would defeat our entire strategy.

What we have set up, as you can see on our website today, are specific learning outlines which deal with the different points of interest within the cultural community in terms of ideology and theology that would be conducive to the radicalization process. We aim to, through our learning outlines, to de-legitimize that ideology.

We have had, like I said, over 200 people who have completed that, in terms of my own direct experience. That is one way. Those learning outlines do have questions and answers. When they are completed some individuals -- in our particular case -- would have a question and answer session with me specifically, and they would be awarded what we call, in our community, an ijazah. Ijazah means an Islamic certification or a licence stating that you are trained in what you have done and that you are certified as a sheik or an instructor in this one particular discipline.

Senator Smith: My other question relates to how you get sanctioned or blessed by the umbrella groups, for lack of a different word? I know there is a little controversy over the last day or two that one of the current leaders was uninvited to give a speech because of bad words that had been used by a previous leader. I am aware of some of these umbrella groups. You are familiar with that one. Are there ones that include, say, the Sunni groups and the Shiite group and some of the other factions? I know some of the Ismailis, some Muslims, do not consider them bona fide Muslims.

Who do you look to be sanctioned? Is your group from any one particular outfit? Is it a Sunni group? You get the gist of what I am talking about. Enlighten us on this.



Mr. Amiruddin: I think, in dealing with that, we have to better understand the at-risk group itself. In terms of al-Qaeda-inspired extremism, it is not an issue which directly affects individuals following the Shiite faith or Sufis, for that matter. These are individuals from the Sunni interpretation of Islam, including my own organization, which is a Sunni organization.

That is one way of looking at it.

Senator Smith: The Wahhabi is a group. I think the country you were referring to was Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Amiruddin: Yes, it was. Specifically, in dealing with this, we have a group of organizations. We have, for example, CCAS, which is a body of Canadian Muslim organizations affiliated to that stream within Sunni Islam. That body supports the traditional model or interpretation which, I would say, is open to Sufi Islam and does not reject it. One of the primary signatures of those individuals who are receptive to extremist manipulation, those groups, is their rejection, for example, of Sufism as a discipline within Islam altogether.

These groups we are working with now represent a silent majority within our community. These groups are specifically Sunni, and hence we are working to build bridges between other groups that are similar to ours. To date, like I said, we have over 50 organizations that are part of this one particular strategy.

Those groups within, generally, the Sunni group that may have literature available to their congregations, which may actually be conducive to radicalization, they of course would reject our arguments. These are not our arguments in regard to our concerns about the radicalization process. These are the findings of groups such as the NYPD and the 9/11 commission report. They have access to a lot of resources and information that you really cannot argue with.

Senator Marshall: Thank you very much for being here. I noticed from the document that you handed out that you also talk about implementation. You are targeting general groups: You have your website and your posters and you are your visiting schools.

Do you target specific individuals and groups in addition to the general group that you are targeting? Do you narrow it down to specific groups?

Mr. Amiruddin: It really depends on how we want to deal with it. Unfortunately, terrorism now is an international phenomenon. I do not think there is any high school student, for example,



throughout Canada who does not know about terrorism, or is not exposed to some sort of media coverage of terrorism.

Once you are exposed to knowledge of terrorism in the context of al Qaeda, then you would also have some sort of a background understanding or some pre-conceived notion of what Islam is or is not. In the context of al Qaeda, it is related to Islam or an Islamic so-called war against the West or other people who oppose their goals and agendas.

The way we have structured our 12-step program is to not specifically target or offend any particular group, but rather it is a generalized thing. We are not using the word "Muslim" or "Islam," for example, we are using "at-risk cultural community," or just a cultural group. Our 12-step program is a program that could be applied to what was discussed earlier, the right-wing groups in America, for example. All you would have to do is work with a specific church group or some group that has a thorough understanding of the ideological or theological context of that group that we are looking to de-radicalize, and they can apply the same 12-step model to their group. It is not necessary that we identify specifically a cultural group for that.

Senator Marshall: You talk about evaluation, and you mentioned that in your document with some information there on the process. How do you measure the success of the program? If you are looking at spending a certain amount of money on the program, how do you determine whether your work has been successful?

Mr. Amiruddin: In the handout you will get after the presentation you will see our aimed objectives and how we will measure that. One way of measuring would be definitely the media and occurrences of terrorist or home-grown terrorist cases. Another would be working closely with partners and the police, any reports or complaints they want to share with us as a community-based organization. Parents sometimes do not know where to turn. That is another way of looking at it.

Another way is through surveys and different privately obtained data that we would carry out within the community, questionnaires for example. That would really give us a better understanding of where we stand in terms of this process. I have highlighted that pretty thoroughly in that handout. Hopefully, when you look at that, that will make it clearer.

...**Senator Marshall:** Thank you.

...**Mr. Amiruddin:** If we were to deal with this particular issue honestly and highlight the problems posed by extremist ideology and those interpretations within our cultural community



which are problematic and give rise to extremist views and lead to radicalization, had it not been for the group that we set up of over 50 mosques and organizations throughout Canada, we would become really a marginalized group. These other groups within our community are well funded from overseas governments in the establishment of their agencies.

One mosque particularly in Mississauga, where I am from, according to *The Globe and Mail* and was given over \$5 million to start and \$1.5 million every year, so they could fund their organization and carry out their plans.

If we were to tell that organization that these particular ideas or these particular books or teachings found in your mosque or in the library at your mosque, while they do not call to terrorism against Canada or any other country for that matter, are still conducive to the radicalization process, right away we would start having an issue with them. We would have a hard time working with them because they would reject our findings. They are not our findings, but rather those of experts in the field.

The Chair: Is it fair to conclude, sheik, as a final matter, that because your organization has been so hands on, so direct and prepared to confront some of the elements of elephants in the room that others do not want to talk about, both inside your community -- which is not monolithic -- and also inside the broader Canadian community, that has made some people uncomfortable with your efforts because they have been so direct and so hands on? Am I overstating that?

Mr. Amiruddin: No, I think you are stating it as it is. That is exactly the current condition that we are faced with.

...**The Chair:** Sheik, I want to thank you for your time this afternoon. I know I speak for all my colleagues. It has been refreshing and very encouraging that a young Canadian leader would take this kind of initiative and be prepared to share it with us this afternoon. Thank you very much.

Mr. Amiruddin: You are welcome.

The Chair: Colleagues, I need a two-minute, in-camera session to talk about one or two future items.

Mr. Amiruddin, thank you very much.

(The committee continued in camera.)