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Burying our heads in the sand will encourage new attacks
By Lawrence J. Haas

WASHINGTON -- An Army psychiatrist at Fort Hood, Texas, allegedly kills 13 of his service mates. A Pakistani immigrant tries to set off a car bomb in Times Square. An American convert to Islam murders a military recruiter in Arkansas.

Each reportedly subscribed to a radical strain of Islam that, they believed, directed them to defend their faith by killing Americans. These attacks, along with the dozens of home-grown plots we know about, raise obvious questions about dangers that may be emanating from the American Muslim community of 2 million to 3 million people.

That suggests that Rep. Peter King, R-N.Y., who heads the House Homeland Security Committee, was right to launch hearings on "The Extent of Radicalization in the American Muslim Community and That Community's Response." Indeed, despite charges that King is conducting a "witch hunt" that smacks of the worst of McCarthyism, Congress would be derelict if it did not study such matters.

Home-grown threats against America that are fueled by radical Islam are on the rise. Law enforcement officials arrested 22 jihadist suspects from May 2009 to November 2010, compared to 21 in the previous seven years, the Congressional Research Service reported.

Five American-Muslims left Northern Virginia to train with radicals in Pakistan in 2009, while 20 young Somali-Americans left Minnesota that year to join the al-Shabaab Islamist group in Somalia.

Since Sept. 11, 2001, the nation has endured more than 50 home-grown terrorist plots, involving about 130 people, *The Wall Street Journal* reported – plots to blow up the Brooklyn Bridge, an office building in Dallas, a federal courthouse in Illinois, Washington's Metro mass transit system and the trans-Alaska pipeline. Just last month, a Colorado woman who converted to Islam pleaded guilty in federal court to conspiring to provide material support to terrorists.

While King has taken the heat, top administration officials share his concerns. Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano told Congress last month that plots to attack America increasingly come from U.S. citizens and residents "inspired by al-Qaida ideology," while Attorney General Eric Holder said he increasingly worries about "people in the United States, American citizens."

American-Muslims also are concerned. Sixty-one percent of them said they were very or somewhat concerned about the potential rise of radical Islam in the United States, according to a 2007 Pew Research Center poll.

They may have good reason. Eight percent of American-Muslims say they believe that suicide bombings to defend Islam are at least sometimes justified, the poll found, while 5 percent view al-Qaida favorably – with an additional 27 percent saying they didn't know or refusing to answer.

The concerned Muslim-Americans include Zuhdi Jasser, who founded the American Islamic Forum for Democracy after September 11 out of concerns that Muslim-American leaders were not speaking forcefully enough against radical Islam and the violence it breeds; Zainab al-Suwaij, who founded the American Islamic Congress after September 11 to, among other things, “champion pluralism and condemn all forms of intolerance”; and Hedieh Mirahmadi, who founded the World Organization for Resource Development & Education to strengthen the influence of moderate Muslim thought.

Interestingly, we heard no charges of a “witch hunt” when Sen. Joseph Lieberman, I-Conn., held 14 hearings about home-grown terrorism from 2006 to 2009 as chair of the Senate Homeland Security Committee. Nor did we hear them when Rep. Jane Harman, D-Calif., held several hearings while chairing a House intelligence subcommittee.

King's hearings, by contrast, have attracted criticism due as much to King's blunt language as anything else. But controversy about King should not deter us from the vital job of understanding the home-grown threat that America may face.

If lawmakers ruffle some feathers in their quest to protect the nation, so be it. The issue is too important to avoid.

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