

**A Ticking Time Bomb:
Counterterrorism Lessons from the U.S. Government's
Failure to Prevent the Fort Hood Attack**

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**Hearing Before the
Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs**

**February 15, 2011
10:30 a.m.**

**Dirksen Senate Office Building
Room SD-342**

Washington, DC

Chairman Lieberman, Ranking Member Collins, distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to testify today about the most significant threat to the security of the American people that I have seen in my lifetime—radical, violent Islamist extremism. I commend this Committee, and the leadership of Senators Lieberman and Collins, for their ongoing work in identifying this dangerous ideology and developing ways to protect against it.

The most recent work of this Committee on this challenge to our national security is its investigative report on the Fort Hood massacre that took place on November 5, 2009. That report puts the key issue front and center and confirms what many of us feared after the attack. Self-radicalized violent Islamist extremists are not just here in America, they have penetrated the U.S. military, which is one of the last places you would expect to find people so violently opposed to this country and its citizens.

I would like to discuss my two reactions to this much needed and comprehensive report. First, I am shocked and stunned by what this report reveals about the failure of the Department of Defense (DOD) to come to grips with violent Islamist extremism and the danger it presents to our troops. Second, I wholeheartedly endorse the report's recommendations for reform in DOD to better protect against this threat.

I will start with my first reaction – just how unacceptable the military's failure to deal properly with Major Hasan's radicalization to violent Islamist extremism was. I reach this conclusion with great sadness. I was proud to serve in the Army, and, while I did, I was involved in helping the military devise policies to protect against racial extremism that turned deadly. And I know the military is full of people at all ranks who are dedicated to protection of the men and women in service. But this time, some of those people – including Hasan's superiors and colleagues – failed to do what was needed to root out a dangerous extremist.

I agree with the report's conclusion that Hasan's open displays of violent Islamist extremism was a violation of military rules calling for good order and discipline. I'll list some of the obvious signs that Hasan should have been discharged that are mentioned in the report:

Hasan's ideology conflicted with standard military obligations, and his repeated statements that he could not support combat against enemies of this country because they shared his religious beliefs demonstrated that he did not belong in the United States military.

It is hard to imagine why Hasan was not removed when, after one of his superiors tried to convince him to leave the military, his displays of violent Islamist extremism worsened. While he was a resident at Walter Reed Army Hospital and a fellow at the military's medical graduate school, Hasan dedicated three projects to the motivations for Islamist extremism instead of medical subjects or psychiatric issues.

Here is a list of things Hasan said and did that, when you add them up, shows he was an extremist who had no place in our armed services:

- He made three off-topic presentations about violent Islamist extremism when he was supposed to be making medical presentations as an Army doctor.
- He gave a class presentation promoting the false argument that U.S. military operations are not based on legitimate security considerations, but instead are a war against Islam.

- The same class presentation was so supportive of Islamist extremism that it was stopped immediately by the instructor when the class of military officers erupted in opposition to Hasan because they thought he was justifying suicide bombers.
- He proposed to give a research survey to Muslim U.S. soldiers which implicitly questioned their loyalty, and actually included a question that asked if they thought they were expected to help enemies of the U.S. because they are Muslims.
- He told several classmates that he thought *Shari'ah* law takes precedence over the U.S. Constitution, despite the fact that as an officer he took an oath to protect the Constitution.
- He stated three times in writing that Muslims in the U.S. military were a risk of fratricide.

One time his class presentation was so alarming that his classmates, who were all officers, erupted in protest because they thought Hasan was endorsing the views of Islamist extremists and justifying suicide bombers. The instructor and a classmate who were there that day both called Hasan “a ticking time bomb”. The saddest and most frightening fact is that Hasan’s written presentations warned that Muslim-Americans in the military who had become radicalized to violent Islamist extremism were at risk of killing fellow soldiers. He put it in writing and that should have been a sign that he might put it into practice.

I want to caution here that I know that our military includes thousands of brave and patriotic Muslim-Americans who serve this country with honor. Some have given their lives in service to our country. When Hasan concluded that Muslim-Americans might commit fratricide, he was not talking about them, but he was giving a warning about himself. As the report states, Hasan’s extremism was not a secret. The officer who assigned him to Fort Hood told commanders there, “You’re getting our worst”.

What should have Hasan’s military superiors done? They should have been able to put the information together and conclude that Hasan believed the same things that the violent Islamist extremist enemies of this country believe, and that meant he should have been out of the military.

But instead of removing Hasan, his superiors promoted him, graduated him from his residency and fellowship, assigned him to Fort Hood and even approved him for deployment to the conflict in Afghanistan. Instead of moving Hasan out, his military commanders moved him up. This is exactly the opposite of what responsible officers should have done.

This brings me to another critical problem revealed in the report—that the military personnel evaluation system broke down when it came to Hasan. I was again shocked to learn from the report that even though Hasan was a poor performer, ranked in the bottom quarter of his class, his evaluations made him sound like a superstar.

During the period when his radicalization to extremism was so visible that it literally stopped a class, he received excellent performance evaluations and was enthusiastically recommended for promotion. Perhaps the most troubling aspect of this is that Hasan’s obsession with Islamist extremism—which was so alarming that it should have gotten him thrown out of the Army—was described as a strength in his evaluations.

The report describes a series of reasons given by the military for failing to deal properly with Hasan. I don’t find any of the reasons credible. A pair of related reasons is that some of Hasan’s superiors believed his views were not problematic and others actually believed he

provided valuable insight into Islamist extremism. This was a terrible misjudgment, because the truth was that Hasan's views were problematic precisely because he was an extremist. It is hard to understand why senior officers did not see that.

There were other more mundane administrative reasons why Hasan was retained and advanced. For example, he was passed on to the fellowship because he was the only applicant for his slot and those involved felt they might lose the fellowship unless it was given to Hasan. When others objected to Hasan getting the fellowship after the fact, he was kept because it was too much trouble to rescind the fellowship once it was offered. For another example, Hasan was assigned to Fort Hood (even though there were concerns about his ability), because some thought that base was so large and well staffed that there would be many Army psychiatrists around Hasan to monitor and report on his work.

All this attention to small bureaucratic matters show that superiors could not see the big picture—Hasan was a dangerous extremist who should not have been in the military at all.

So why did Hasan's superiors fail to take the action that was necessary? That brings me to my second reaction to the investigative report, which is my agreement with the report's recommendations about changing military policies and training to identify the threat of violent Islamist extremism among service members and to require that it be reported and dealt with.

When I testified at a hearing before this Committee at the beginning of its investigation, I said this: "It should not be an act of moral courage for a soldier to identify a fellow soldier who is displaying extremist behavior, it should be an obligation." That is as true today as it was then. Unfortunately, the report reveals that the military to this day still does not have policies and training which identify what violent Islamist extremism is and what our men and women should do when they see it.

I know that a lot of good people in the military have reviewed the Fort Hood attack to determine lessons learned, and some of their work and recommendations do move us forward. But we have to directly address the exact threat we face exactly, and that threat is violent Islamist extremism. Over a year after the Fort Hood attack, this direct and honest step still has not been taken by the military. Instead, the military avoids labeling our enemy for what it is, rather subsuming it under ambiguous terms such as "extremism" or trying to call it something completely different such as "workplace violence." That is not acceptable, because it leaves our service members vulnerable to more attacks from these extremists.

The military's unwillingness to confront the threat of Islamist extremism directly is all the more puzzling and out of character because in the past, the military has moved swiftly to respond to threats. During the Cold War the military enacted and implemented sophisticated subversion and espionage policies to deal with the ideology and tactics of our enemies. When racism and gang violence infiltrated our armed services, the military moved promptly put in place policies and training designed to clearly inform service members on exactly what was prohibited and instructed them to report service members whose words or conduct indicated that they may be dangerous. That sort of clarity in policy in training is needed now for the threat we are faced with now—violent Islamist extremism.

Clarity is all the more important here because of the complexity of dealing with someone, like Hasan, who commingles dangerous extremism with religion. Unless service members clearly understand the difference between legitimate religious observance and dangerous extremism,

everyone in the military is in an unfair position. It is unfair and ineffective to place service members who have not been trained to identify Islamist extremists in a position where they have to decide if someone is an Islamist extremist. The reason is that service members are understandably reluctant to interfere with the practice of religion and that they are, rightly, trained by the military to respect religious observance. But that should never mean that violent Islamist extremism should be tolerated. The DOD's failure to identify the enemy clearly causes service members at all ranks to avoid dealing with extremists properly, just as they avoided the need to deal with Hasan.

The lack of clarity is also deeply unfair to the thousands of Muslims who serve honorably in the U.S. military. If service members clearly understand the difference between their religion, and the dangerous radicalism of violent Islamist extremism, the patriotic Muslims in our armed services will be protected against unwarranted suspicion. In fact, it was just that sort of awful, untrue stereotype about Muslim soldiers that Hasan himself believed and promoted in his statements and projects. The best way to defeat that stereotype is to educate our service members about the difference between the legitimate, peaceful observance of Islam, which is respected and protected, and the violent Islamist extremism which should lead to reporting, discharge and law enforcement intervention.

I endorse the changes that this report recommends because they do what needs to be done to fix the problems I have just described. They are necessary to make – and they are not hard to make.

First, military policies regarding religious discrimination and religious accommodation should make clear that violent Islamist extremism is not permitted and is not the same thing as the protected, peaceful practice of religion. This change would establish the important distinction that was not understood by those who failed to deal with Hasan.

Second, currently existing military policies on extremism should be modified to state explicitly that Islamist extremism is one form of extremism that is not allowed.

Third, service members should be trained and educated about violent Islamist extremism.

And fourth, protections against violent Islamist extremism need to be enforced. There needs to be an expectation in the military that, when you see a fellow service member exhibiting signs of violent Islamist extremism, you report it, and if you are a commander and you find out about it, you take action. Perhaps the right action for the commander is further investigation, perhaps the right action is discipline, perhaps the right action is counseling if the soldier in question is not radicalized too deeply, perhaps the right action is discharge, and perhaps the right action is immediate reporting to intelligence or law enforcement if the threat of harm is imminent. But it is right to act and wrong to ignore this problem, and military policies and training need to reflect that.

I know from my experience that the changes this report recommends could be made and implemented in a month if DOD chose to do so. That sort of urgency is necessary because our men and women in the military are vulnerable to a known danger and because DOD has an equal responsibility to protect its thousands of brave and patriotic Muslim-American service members from unwarranted suspicion by colleagues who have never been trained about what violent Islamist extremism is and how it differs from the peaceful exercise of Islam.

I welcome this Committee's hard work to protect them and hope that DOD will act immediately to follow the recommendations in the investigative report.