United States Senate
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

'The Roots of Violent Islamist Extremism and Efforts to Counter It'
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Mr. Chairman, Senator Collins, Distinguished Members of the Committee:
In violent Islamist extremism, the United States faces a complex, little understood, and rapidly evolving threat. I am therefore particularly grateful for the opportunity to address this important hearing, and to provide some background information that will help us contextualize and locate violent Islamism within the much broader and diverse universe of contemporary Islamic political thought and activism. I would also like to address the phenomenon of Islamism in the West (more specifically in the United Kingdom) and the question of what the United States might be able to learn from the UK's experience of dealing with various manifestations of Islamism—violent and otherwise—in recent years.

Just as Islam cannot be said to be a monolith, the same goes for Islamism as an ideological project. While it is possible to identify certain key figures and groups as being central to the genealogy of modern Islamism, those who have subsequently drawn on their ideas or organized themselves in their mold have often done so in widely varying ways—interpreting and adapting their views to disparate and sometimes even mutually exclusive agendas. If our goal today is to make some definitive determination as to whether Islamism as a political ideology fosters or hinders violent extremism, then we are likely to be disappointed. Having lived the better part of my life in the Muslim world and having spent the last fifteen years researching political Islam across a wide range of geographic, cultural, and political settings (including, since the mid-1990s, close observation of Islamist groups in the UK, both radical and non-radical), I find myself in the following dilemma, analytically: I can point to any number of occasions when I have seen individuals and groups that can be said to represent, or to be influenced by, Islamist ideology engage in behaviors that push fellow Muslims "up the staircase" of terrorism—to invoke a metaphor commonly used by another of our panelists—and, likewise, I can provide an equal range of examples of situations where I have seen Islamists or those influenced in some way by Islamist ideology do things that I am convinced played a vital role in keeping young Muslims from falling under the sway of radical beliefs. In short, in seeking to understand and counter violent Islamist ideology, I do not believe it to be a useful task for us to sit as judge and jury over Islamism more generally.

In seeking to identify root causes for violent Islamic extremism, I think we also need to question today the extent to which the answer is to be found primarily in ideology. While ideas are undoubtedly important, they will only drive an individual to act if articulated in terms that resonate with and seem to provide solutions that can address a person's own life circumstances and needs. In this regard, I believe that the sociological

and psychological contextualization of Islamist ideology holds the key to understanding the conditions under which it potentially poses a violent threat. Let me move on now to provide some background information on modern Islamism and the evolution of its radical and violent variants before going on to address the issue of Islamism in Europe and the experiences of those charged with addressing the various challenges it poses.

In 1928, a schoolteacher in Egypt named Hassan al-Banna established a group known as the Muslim Brotherhood (hereafter 'MB'). The MB sought to ensure a continued role for religion in society and saw itself as an antidote to the Westernizing and secularizing tendencies of the country's dominant political actors in the early postcolonial period. Many Islamist leaders at the time also argued that the doctrine of modern nationalism was incompatible with the teachings of Islam and the ideal of the *umma* (the community of believers, potentially global in scope). While not initially established as a political party, the Brotherhood very quickly became implicated in the rapidly evolving political landscape of Egypt in the 1930s and 1940s. Branches of the Brotherhood were established throughout the Arab world, and it also inspired the founding of similar groups in countries such as Pakistan (the Jama'at-i Islami) and Turkey (the Refah Party). With its enormous popularity and rapid inroads into the country's new educated and middle classes, Nasser began to see the MB as a political threat. Banned and driven underground from the 1950s, the movement became radicalized. This phase of its existence is most commonly associated with its chief ideologue at the time, Sayyid Qutb. Qutb—whose ideas went on to become very influential on successive generations of radical Islamists (including groups such as Al-Qaeda—see below)—had become convinced, like a number of his contemporary Third World activists, that it had become impossible to work within the existing political system to ensure a political role for Islam. Revolutionary politics and armed struggle (*jihad*—from the Arabic word for 'strive'), in Qutb's teaching, were the required paths to achieve social change in the Muslim world.

Yet Qutb's views appealed only to a fringe minority in the Muslim world and, in the successive generation, to only a very small fraction of Islamists. His views on *jihad*, for example, were regarded by most Muslims (and by most Islamic scholars) as a highly unorthodox departure from traditional understandings of that concept as purely defensive in nature. In other Muslim-majority countries during this period, Islamist parties had evolved into opposition movements. While some of them still continued to question the legitimacy of the secular state, they did not embrace violent tactics. In Egypt, under Nasser's successor Anwar Sadat, the Muslim Brotherhood was once again permitted to operate as a charity and social movement (but not as a political party) after its leadership renounced violence. This shift prompted some within the group who were still beholden to Qutb's views to split off from the MB and form radical splinter groups, some of which in more recent years have become integrated into Al-Qaeda. Banned from formal politics in Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood instead began to build a strong base of social support at the neighborhood and municipal levels, establishing vast social service and charity networks, and gaining control of all leading professional associations and syndicates.

While these may seem to be highly localized, domestic developments, it is interesting to note that an important part of what allowed the Islamists to build up this kind of support within Egypt's civil societal spaces was the set of forces we refer to today as *globalization*. As Sadat opened up Egypt's economy to world markets and the country undertook neoliberal economic reforms at the behest of institutions such as the

International Monetary Fund (IMF), the scale of state welfare and employment provision was scaled back significantly. This created 'gaps' in the provision of basic services that the Islamists were able to fill very skillfully, gaining widespread support and popular legitimacy in the process.

The 1980s saw a significant increase in the global visibility of political Islam as it became increasingly entwined with Cold War geopolitics. Three events from this decade are particularly noteworthy in terms of their importance to understanding the contemporary interface between Islam and global politics. After the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, a number of volunteer fighters from the Arab world traveled to Afghanistan assist in repelling what they interpreted as an atheist incursion into Muslim territories. These 'Arab-Afghans,' as they came to be known, were important insofar as their experience during these years (1980-88) helped to crystallize the ideological and geopolitical vision that would later define Al-Qaeda. Among this cadre from the Middle East was to be found Usama Bin Laden, a member of the wealthiest commercial family in Saudi Arabia who had renounced his family's business in the name of what he saw as a larger struggle against new forms of global, imperial atheism. The eventual withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan was interpreted by Bin Laden and his ilk as a victory and as evidence of Islam's ability to triumph over the world's superpowers. From the crucible of this experience was hence born Bin Laden's vision Al-Qaeda: an effort to globalize the Afghan experience.

As we can see from the preceding discussion, Al-Qaeda—for many, the group that most readily springs to mind today when speaking of Islam and violent extremism—needs to be situated within a diverse and multi-faceted ecology of world political Islam. Al-Qaeda was established in Afghanistan by Arab-Afghan fighters following the decision by the Soviet Union to withdraw its troops from that country after a failed occupation effort. Emboldened by this seeming victory, Al-Qaeda sought to export the Afghan model to other countries in which Muslims were understood to be fighting foreign invasions or resisting imposed secularism. The move to establish the group also represented a major shift away from the worldview of earlier radical Islamists such as Sayyid Qutb and the groups he inspired. For them, the goal was to successfully attack and supplant the "near enemy," that is the leaders of secular-national regimes in the Middle East and other Muslim majority countries who were perceived as the proxies of Western powers. Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda's new emphasis on the "far enemy," inspired by the Afghan experience, emphasized instead the idea of directly attacking what they understood to be the source of global imperialism and atheism—namely, the United States. Al-Qaeda's goals are the liberation of Muslim territories from occupying infidel forces and the making of a world that is "safe for Islam"—understood to mean a world in which a social political order based on *shari'ah* (Islamic law) can be realized. Some within this camp understand this to mean the re-establishment of centralized political authority in the Muslim world via new Caliphate, an institution that had existed since the seventh century but had been abolished by Mustapha Kemal at the end of the Ottoman Empire.

Al-Qaeda today is in many ways better thought of as a particular *discourse of resistance* whose material reality is to be found in a transnational coordinating network highly skilled in forging temporary operational ties with local/regional movements or individuals in many global settings in order to engage in violent activism. Far from

representing a crude, kneejerk reaction to globalization, Al-Qaeda actually appropriates the logistical and communicative infrastructures of globalization to pursue the fulfillment of a narrative, a "story," internalized by its leadership, about the necessity and inevitability of Islam's triumph over the infidel (unbelieving) forces of world power—particularly the United States and its allies in Europe and elsewhere. Al-Qaeda as a radical Islamist group is in many ways quite unorthodox even within the ranks of the wider *jihadist* movement, many of whose members did not agree with Bin Laden's decision to carry out the September 2001 attacks on the United States. While Al-Qaeda's model of global Islamic politics has attracted only a few thousand of the world's 1.25 *billion* Muslims in terms of actual members, some in the Muslim world are drawn to Usama Bin Laden as a symbol of anti-Americanism (even while they usually disagree with the methods he employs). In the wake of the attacks of September 11, 2001 (and a number of subsequent bombings in Europe and elsewhere—such as the London bombings of July 2005—attributed to Al-Qaeda and its affiliates), we have seen an increased *politicization of Muslim identity* around the world—particularly among Muslim populations in Europe and North America. This has meant that debates around Islam and Muslims have come to take on wider significance beyond the question of terrorism and violence, reinvigorating discussions of whether 'Islam' and 'the West' are compatible in cultural or civilizational terms—as per Samuel Huntington's 'Clash of Civilizations' thesis (see below). We have seen aspects of this in events such as the 2006 Danish cartoon affair and the controversy surrounding the Pope's speech later that same year.

As Olivier Roy has noted in his book *Globalized Islam*, it is possible today to identify two distinct generations of Al-Qaeda activists. The comparative sociology of these groups is telling in terms of what it allows us to discern about the evolving nature of the jihadi discourse and movement. The first generation of Al-Qaeda operatives, those who constituted the bulk of the organization in the late 1980s and very early 1990s, were generally citizens of Muslim countries and had direct prior experience of political or militant activism either in their home countries, as Arab-Afghans, or—most commonly—both. They generally had very little experience of the West and their axis of movement was generally confined to Afghanistan, Muslim conflicts in neighboring countries, and their countries of origin.[1] The second wave of Al-Qaeda personnel, from the 1990s, by contrast, tended to have strong connections to the West. Many were recruited in Europe (and to some extent North America) or were citizens of Muslim countries who had spent some time living, studying or training in the West as expatriates. Important to note about this second generation, Roy tells us, is the "deterritorialized" nature of its Muslim identity. Where the original Al-Qaeda activists were firmly socialized in a nation-state environment and had developed their Islamist consciousness primarily in terms of its circumstances, this new generation of jihadis often had weak senses of national and religious identity. For many in the first wave, transnationalism was something of a reach, an idea they needed to get their heads around; for the second generation, however, it was a natural way of life—the "jihadi jet set."[2]

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[1] O. Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Umma*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004, pp. 257-58.
[2] O. Roy, op. cit., p. 302.

In order to better understand this new mode of malignant cosmopolitanism, we need to look more closely at how and why radical religious discourse resonated with these deterritorialized identities. We will discuss these processes primarily in the context of the recruitment and socialization of young Muslims in Western contexts since Al-Qaeda and other radical groups seem to have relied heavily on these settings to provide many of the foot soldiers for their second generation operations. In terms of the first wave, the socialization into jihad occurred primarily through existing radical Islamist structures whose activities and leaderships became increasingly transnational from the 1980s. When looking at the second wave, however, we are confronted with a situation in which ideologues and recruiters are often handed a *tabula rasa* Muslim identity (in the form of a new convert or an immigrant Muslim experiencing new-found sense of religiosity) upon which they employ a range of discursive and disciplining techniques to inculcate certain worldviews and activist tendencies. This may sound like we are referring to something akin to brainwashing, but at work here is actually a much more sophisticated process of socialization that leverages existing cognitive, ideational, and identity formations to sculpt a very particular form of global Muslim subjectivity.

Several observers have already noted the "deculturing" or "universalizing" dimensions of salafi Islam.[3] These two terms refer, respectively, to the analytical and normative aspects of a similar phenomenon. Salafism, with its hostility towards religious innovation (*bid'a*) aims to rid Islam of anything that has entered the faith through contact with various local, "cultural" beliefs and practices. There are no schools of jurisprudence to debate between, salafis insist—there is only Islam. In a normative sense this has proven very appealing to many young Muslims living in the West who feel alienated by their parents' understanding of Islam. To them, their parents seem trapped in an understanding of Islam as it was practiced in, for example, the village in Bangladesh from which they migrated twenty years ago. They seem obsessed with trivial details relating to how one should hold one's hands while praying, saints days, various festivals—but nothing to do with religion, modern life, or political questions. Rejecting the "village Islam" of their parents they go in search of a form of Islam that speaks to the issues and challenges of living as a Muslim in a global world—and, moreover, a Muslim caught between two senses of identity. The second and third immigrant generations have generally been born and raised in the West and are well versed (and often comfortable with) its cultural patterns and norms. At the same time, they are aware of belonging to a different and at times disparate identify formation, that of Islam. They search for a universal form of religion that will help them to reconcile what they are (Muslims) with where they are (the West), and that will also help to provide them with some sense of meaning and purpose.

This search for a universal idiom of Islam can lead in two general directions. In some cases it prompts young Muslims in the West to emphasize those aspects of their religion that reflect global human rights norms, democracy and political and cultural pluralism: the umma as an integral part of a common global humanity. But this same search for universal Islam can also lead towards a universalism defined, religiously, in

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[3] O. Roy, op. cit., p. 258; P. Mandaville, 'Sufis and Salafis: The Political Discourse of Transnational Islam', in R. Hefner (ed), *Remaking Muslim Politics: Pluralism, Contestation, Democratization,* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005, pp. 314-15

salafi terms—and, politically, in terms of Muslim struggles the world over: the umma as a righteous community under assault. While there is no sure way of determining which of these two general currents will prevail when it comes to a given individual, it is possible to make observations about how and why the salafi discourse in particular may seem appealing under certain circumstances. It is also important to note that only a very tiny minority of those drawn to salafi Islamist circles in the West ever get anywhere near the battlefield of jihad. For many, political salafism is a "phase" they go through before either slipping into a conservative but non-Islamist mode of religious practice, or, in some cases, becoming so disillusioned with the movement that they begin to question the very basis of salafism or even Islam. We have already referred above to the deculturing nature of salafi Islam. Several other aspects of the radical discourse merit our attention in terms of their interaction with identity and shifting religious norms in Western contexts.

For those Western Muslims who experience their dual identities as confusing and destabilizing, radical Islamic discourses can provide a matrix of meaning that permits them to derive a clearer sense of purpose and worldview. By shifting the focus of their identity away from the apparent tension between being, for example, simultaneously British and South Asian, and orienting it instead towards a resolution of this tension in a universal, salafi Islam and membership in the global umma, radical ideologues help culturally disoriented Muslims (or recent converts, as yet unsure of their way in Islam) to experience their lack of clear identity foothold not as a weakness or an absence, but rather as something empowering that invests them with the ability to be a "real" Muslim—and, moreover, to prove it by becoming politically engaged on behalf of the embattled umma. Describing the appeal of the radical Islamist group Hizb ut-Tahrir, one former member put it this way:

> They had a very profound analysis of why the Islamic world is in such an abysmal state, how it declined and most importantly how we can elevate ourselves from this position, and break free. The group was not allied to any political regime, it was not operating on the basis of personal or financial motivation, it didn't have a sectarian approach. As long as you are a Muslim and are committed to its beliefs and its causes, you are welcome to join the party.[4]

A previously liminal identity thus rediscovers itself as part of the vanguard of a new global movement. Radical salafism accomplishes a gradual "desocietization" whereby adherents withdraw further and further from the ambient mainstream community, associating exclusively with other "real Muslims" and gradually detaching themselves from the national-societal contexts in which they live.

Another dimension of Muslims' attraction to radical movements relates to the personal charisma associated with the scholars and leaders of these movements. Various observers have noted that within Al-Qaeda's second wave, some of those recruited in the West have been living on the margins of society—often coming from broken homes and families, unemployed, involved in petty crime and so forth. The leaders of the radical

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[4] M. Whine, 'Hizb ut-Tahrir in Open Societies', in Z. Baran, *The Challenge of Hizb ut-Tahrir: Deciphering and Combating Radical Islamist Ideology,* Washington DC: The Nixon Center, 2004.

groups, as one analyst has documented, tend to display a genuine sense of care for those who come into their circle.[5] For many young Muslims living in the margins, frequently subject to racism and discrimination, this will represent the first time someone has ever seemed to take a genuine interest in them and the direction of their lives. The personal charisma of radical ideologues hence seems vitally important in terms of creating an emotional bond with members of the group.[6]

Many drawn to the radical movements are not by any means marginalized members of society. Rather, they often have very high levels of education, are employed, and even have families in some cases (compare with the demographics of mainstream Islamist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood). Theirs is not a lack of social integration, but rather a seemingly successful integration process that has gone awry. Elements of the identity and worldview crises alluded to above begin to enter the picture and they come to the radical circles in search of a clearer sense of meaning. Well aware of the educational background of these potential recruits—many of whom will have graduated from top scientific and engineering schools—the religious scholars and intellectuals will often articulate radical Islamist ideology in a form that fits comfortably with the "cognitive style" and methods of analysis to which their students are accustomed. Salafi Islam is particularly conducive to this approach. The grammar of salafism suits the structure of modern scientific knowledge production. When teaching salafi Islam to such a group, for example, a sheikh will diagram it on a board such that it closely resembles problem-solving methods or engineering flowcharts. Given that much of the salafi discourse can be explained in terms of discrete categories of analysis, it becomes a relatively straightforward matter to communicate its teachings in a way that allows a follow with a techno-scientific education to work methodically through a given situation (framed in terms of religiously-given normative categories) and to eventually achieve—just as science does—a single, correct answer at the end of that process. This answer, it should be noted is not subjective and nor is it open to interpretation. It is the end result, again, just like science, of an "objective" method whose infallibility is beyond reproach. Faith in science as a technical method becomes faith in salafism as a religious method.

Observers and analysts of radical Islam have speculated as to the process that leads an individual to become willing to engage in violence, or other forms of "high risk" activism.[7] Is it the religion itself that "radicalizes" them? Is it the teachings of a senior religious scholar who eventually convinces them that violence in the name of Islam is not only permitted, but required of them? Limited anecdotal evidence actually suggests that many individuals come into radical circles having already decided that they want to engage in some form of confrontational politics. Some, in fact, may only very recently have become Muslim, or "reactivated" a previously dormant sense of religiosity.[8] Thus it

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[5] Q. Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism in the West,* Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005.

[6] F. Gerges, *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 34.

[7] Q. Wiktorowicz, op. cit., p. 4.

[8] M. Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks,* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004.

is not salafism, Islamist ideology, or the authority of religious scholars that serve as the "radicalizing agents," but rather prior life experiences and worldviews that have culminated in a decision to actively seek participation in confrontational politics or even violence. The religious authority of salafi sheikhs, in any case, is anything but absolute. While those who engage in jihad do seek religious justification for their actions, they may sometimes do so after having already decided to act. In this regard, given the lack of religious hierarchy in Islam, it becomes easy for them to shop around—via the Internet or personal connections—to find a sheikh who will authorize and, moreover, provide textually grounded (and hence irreproachable) evidence as to why violence is permitted or even required in a given situation. It is also worth recalling here Sayyid Qutb's teachings about how activist interpretations are privileged above those of religious scholars. For someone strongly molded in the "Qutbist" worldview, there is the potential that they may even untether themselves from formal sources of religious authority altogether. This phenomenon is illustrated in testimony given by the widow of a jihadi accused of planning the 2002 Madrid train bombings: "Sometimes we received texts [by religious scholars] from the Internet, but my husband did not read them, his relationship to jihad was instinctual."[9] Thus while activists may operate in frameworks whose general normative parameters are defined by a given religious authority, their willingness to engage in violence is not necessarily a learned behavior accruing exclusively from their participation in this network. Moreover, it seems that under certain circumstances they may disconnect from, or simply ignore, those aspects and teachings emanating from formally trained religious scholars that are dissonant with the activist orientation to which they have committed.

While the responses of the United States and its allies have severely damaged Al-Qaeda in important ways, there are those who believe that Bin Laden's movement still represents a significant threat to the United States.[10] Quite aside from the important question of Al-Qaeda's operational capacity, there are other ways in which we can think of Al-Qaeda as harboring important symbolic power today—particularly in the eyes of some young Muslims in the West:

(1) *Al-Qaeda as ideology*: a worldview or mindset consisting of a general critique of the prevailing world system shared by a wide range of radical Islamist groups (some affiliated with Al-Qaeda, some not), and also a desire to actively strike at the perceived sources of global injustice and enforced secularism—mainly the United States and its allies.

(2) *Al-Qaeda as mythology*: the worldview described above can also be marketed as a legendary status symbol well after Al-Qaeda's own active career (or the life of its leader) has come to an end. The Al-Qaeda "brand name" continues to inspire not only radical Islamists, but all manner of popular anti-systemic movements who now have evidence, based on Al-Qaeda's example, that it is possible to mount successful attacks on the sources of world hegemony.

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[9] F. Gerges, op. cit., p. 8.

[10] B. Hoffman, 'The Myth of Grassroots Terrorism: Why Usama Bin Laden Still Matters,' *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2008.

(3) *Al-Qaeda as technology*: Bin Laden's movement provides a basic model or template for networked organization and activism, aspects of which can be emulated by various "franchises" across various scales—local, national, regional, and global.

As ideology, mythology, and technology, it seems likely that some aspect of Al-Qaeda will continue to exert influence in radical Islamist circles even if and when its operational capacity is destroyed or disappears. The popular appeal of radical Islam, particularly in its activist variant, will continue to be limited to a very small and highly extreme minority of Muslims. Many of the symbols it champions and aspects of its overall critique, however, will still resonate more widely in the Muslim world.

Some of the more prominent manifestations of "Al-Qaeda 2.0" have appeared in Europe in recent years, with the Madrid bombings of 2004 and the London attacks of 2005 being the most important. These events have prompted European governments to essay a wide range of counter-terrorism strategies, some focused quite specifically on known individuals or institutions, others on general outreach to European Muslim communities and various preventive measures. U.S. partners on the other side of the Atlantic have at times been very creative in their outreach efforts, but have also encountered major challenges. In the United Kingdom, for example, the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) played the role of "Muslims-in-chief" for Tony Blair's government until a number of controversies around the group—not least of all the presence within its ranks of a number of mosque councils associated with intolerant views and Council leadership's ties to Islamist "legacy groups"—sent Whitehall in search of alternative interlocutors. In fact, the MCB, in terms of its membership, is undoubtedly the largest and most diverse Muslim body in the country. Its problems, however, lay precisely in the challenges associated with reconciling within the discourse of a single umbrella body the views of over 500 member organizations, ranging from South Asian-style Deobandi *madrasas* in rural Yorkshire to cosmopolitan progressive Muslim groups in southern English cities. One result of this persistent ideological-sectarian divide within the UK's Muslim community has been the formation of the British Muslim Forum (BMF) in 2005, a body established to give voice to the majority (by a slim margin) Barelwi—that is, traditionalist/Sufi—current within British Islam. British government efforts, most recently under the auspices of the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG), moved away from exclusive reliance on the MCB to focus on highly localized issues and initiatives via, for example, the Preventing Extremism Together (PET) program.

Part of the problem, however, is that the majority of Muslims living in the West, and particularly the younger generation, do not identify with any of the groups in question. This insight was at least partly reflected in the conceptualization of one of the more creative initiatives to come in the wake of the July 7, 2005 London bombings, the Radical Middle Way project. Combining public messaging, multimedia outreach, and traveling roadshow events, the Radical Middle Way—a partnership between several youth-oriented Muslim organizations (including Q-News, the Federation of Student Islamic Societies, and the Young Muslim Organisation—the latter two having some historical ties to Islamist groups) and the British government—showcases the views of

several leading Muslim scholarly and intellectual voices. The figures involved, such as Tariq Ramadan and the American neo-traditional scholar Sheikh Hamza Yusuf, are noteworthy for the size of their following among younger Muslims and for their strong credentials as authentic voices of Islam willing to criticize Western governments and their policies. Sheikh Ali Goma'a, the Grand Mufti of Egypt, is also on the roster. Very few of the speakers connected to the project have strong ties to or could be considered representatives of particular Islamic—or Islami*st*—groups, reflecting the aforementioned tendency within the younger generation to seek out independent voices. While this initiative is undoubtedly a step in the right direction, it would seem that the impact has been minimal insofar as those attending the events or picking up lectures on CDs already subscribe to the views being presented. Again, one has to question whether this is a meaningful space for engaging young Muslims whose sense of anger, disaffection, confused sense of identity, and desire for confrontational politics may have them looking towards radical—and potentially violent—alternatives. In some sense it would be unfair to place that burden on a program such as the Radical Middle Way whose original purposes were more in line with bolstering the morale and confidence of young, independent and creative Muslims in the West rather than acting as a bulwark to radicalism.

Another relevant example here and one that is particularly useful in illustrating the complexity of the questions at hand relates to the London Metropolitan Police's Muslim Contact Unit (MCU). Under the leadership of Robert Lambert, the MCU was in the frontline of outreach and coordination with Muslims in the British capital around issues of radicalism and terrorist threats. In this capacity, Lambert worked with and cites the contribution of various Islamists, including the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB—the British branch of the Muslim Brotherhood) as central to the successful rehabilitation of the notorious Finsbury Park Mosque, previously the HQ and chief pulpit for salafi-jihadi scholar Abu Hamza al-Masri. Lambert also acknowledges the contributions of salafi leaders at the Brixton Mosque in south London for their role in bringing to his attention and working to counter the sources and influence of hateful preaching. The most prominent Islamist current to be found in the UK comes from South Asia and the various "legacy groups" associated with the Pakistanti and Bangladeshi branches of the Jama'at-i Islami movement. These influences are to be found in groups such as the UK Islamic Mission, the Islamic Forum Europe, Young Muslims UK and the Islamic Society of Britain. But one cannot simply understand the role of these groups today through the ideological positions of their founders. With most of them now at least a generation removed from the South Asian immigrants who first established them and with the younger generation coming into positions of prominence, one begins to detect in certain of these groups—such as the Islamic Society of Britain and the Islamic Foundation (previously the UK publishing wing of the Jama'at-i Islami)—the contours of a new and distinctly British approach to Islam. This is a discourse that emphasizes the compatibility between being British and being Muslim. As operationalized "on the streets," this vision involves the local leaders of these groups serving a role akin to social workers and "big brothers," taking vulnerable and disaffected young Muslim men under their wing. And yet the tendency, in some cases, to encourage socializing in exclusively Muslim circles and, in others, a seemingly exclusive preoccupation with foreign policy and political issues abroad, leads one to wonder to what extent a sense of Muslim identity

as something "separate" from mainstream British society might not be reinforced through the efforts of these groups. In short, is there a trade off between public order/security and social cohesion at work here?

Finally, what might the British experience of Islamism teach about how patterns could evolve within the Muslim population of the United States? We need to first recognize that the two communities are very different. While Muslim immigrants to the United States were mostly highly educated, employed in professional vocations, and generally well integrated, the same cannot be said of the Britain's immigrant Muslim population. The issues and challenges faced by the two communities have hence been very different. There is a much larger historical "pool of discontent" from which British Muslims have been able to draw inspiration and see themselves reflected (even when relatively successful in terms of education and employment). We would consequently expect the threat from home grown terrorism in the United States to be much lower. Indeed, the comprehensive surveys undertaken as part of the Pew Research Center's 2007 study of Muslim Americans indicated that the vast majority of Muslims in this country are moderate, mainstream in their social and political values, and well integrated. But one cannot ignore the fact that we have seen in recent years isolated incidents that suggest the presence of another dynamic: the Virginia Jihad Network, the Lackawanna Six, the Fort Dix plot, and others. While there is not yet evidence of a systematic or widespread threat of home-grown terrorism in the United States, it is worth considering the kind of circumstances that might allow such a situation to emerge. The ideological precursors, as we already know, are widely in circulation on the Internet and elsewhere. But as we have already argued, ideology alone is not a sufficient variable to explain radicalization. In the case of the UK, the experience of Muslims in that country as being a community subjected historically to discrimination and, more recently, as singled out and defined in terms of the threat it potentially poses to security, has provided a tangible basis on which to graft violent Islamist ideology. Heretofore, such a "grievance base" has been largely absent among Muslims in the United States. Should Muslims in this country begin to feel more markedly singled out and/or defined in terms of terrorism and threats to national security, the easier it may be for some among them to understand the worldview and vision of Islamic extremism as something that addresses their life circumstances. Finally, given the extremely broad and diverse nature of Islamism as an ideological movement, there is little doubt that among their affiliates and sympathizers are still to be found figures in the United States who act as fundraisers and financiers to groups currently classified as terrorist entities. In other cases, individuals associated with groups in the Middle East and elsewhere have fomented community tensions and divisive attitudes by "channeling" views and agendas from abroad directly into the streets of America.[11] Such individuals, however, represent a fringe minority within a movement whose core agenda has been undergoing significant transformation in the younger generation. To define Islamism exclusively or primarily in terms of their activities would therefore be akin to throwing out an enormous baby with very little bathwater.

Thank you again for the opportunity to address the Committee.

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[11] One thinks here, for example, of the 2006 controversy involving Muslim taxi drivers at the Minneapolis airport.