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Islamist Extremism in Europe
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Mr Chairman and Members of the Committee, thank you for giving me the opportunity to talk about this important topic.

I intend today to talk about the ideology of jihadism in Europe. To do so, I believe that I should begin by defining terms. Islamism, a form of Islam also known as fundamentalism or salafi Islam, is a creation of the early 20th century. Today only about 20% of the Islamic world follows some version of Islamism, which means that 80% are moderate or traditional Muslims who disagree profoundly with this vision of Islam. The main characteristic of Islamism is a belief that Islam must have political power and state control in order to be correctly implemented. Jihadism is the radical version of Islamism which has decided that only violence will allow them to create the perfect Islamic state. This can be contrasted with the vast majority of Islamists, who support some sort of gradual political or social process to achieve their ends. Jihadis have several other distinctive beliefs that separate them from the majority of both Muslims and Islamists. Most importantly, they argue that democracy is not just wrong, it is in direct contradiction to the fundamental principle of Islam (*tawhid*). Anyone who supports democracy becomes, in this belief system, an infidel who can and should be killed. Second, they recognize only one version of Islamic law (shari'a) as correct and state that any Muslim who does not follow their variety of shari'a is not only a sinner, but also a non-believer. Finally, they have vowed eternal violence and hatred toward all non-Muslims until the entire world is ruled by their version of Islamic law. The men who carried out the attacks on the US on 9/11 were jihadis, as are the other members of al-Qa'ida, Zarqawi and many other terrorists and terrorist groups active in the Islamic world today.

European jihadism shares many of the same characteristics of jihadism in general. Jihadis in Europe are also anti-democratic and anti-liberal arguing, as do their ideological brethren around the world that democracy contradicts the fundamental principle of Islam. 'Umar Bakri Muhammad, the leader of al-Muhajiroun (a British jihadist group) says that democracy is a separate religion from Islam and therefore anyone who follows its tenets has put himself outside the fold of Islam. Hizb al-Tahrir, which is active throughout Europe, compares democracy to prostitution and gambling to show the serious sin that a Muslim is committing if he votes or joins a political party. Ideas such as religious and personal freedom, pluralism, compromise and interfaith dialog are also attacked by European jihadis as un-Islamic.

Many European jihadis too have as their main goal the creation of a worldwide Islamic state which they call the "Caliphate." There are several groups throughout Britain, Germany and Turkey which have dedicated themselves to setting up this state and who believe that eventually the entire world will be dominated by their version of Islam. In some instances, jihadis have taken over mosques and attempted to implement their vision of Islam immediately, punishing any Muslims who do not follow their precepts or leadership. The recent case of Metin Kaplan in

Germany is instructive in this regard: he declared himself the Caliph and, when he was forced to flee from Turkey to Germany, simply set up his own miniature regime in Cologne. When a competitor attempted to make himself into a rival Caliph, Kaplan had him murdered.

Jihadis in Europe—as around the world—have not been backward about declaring other Muslims non-believers, an act known as “takfir.” Takfir is not just a theoretical or religious declaration, as excommunication has now become within Christianity. It has specific legal stipulations, which include the declaring of the blood of the apostate “halal” (i.e. it can be shed by anyone without fear of punishment), his divorce from his spouse, the loss of rights to any property, which can be looted by anyone who wishes, and his loss of the right to inherit or pass on goods by inheritance. To declare “takfir” on a fellow Muslim means, in fact, that anyone can kill that Muslim and take all his goods without penalty or sin. Some jihadis in Europe have declared most of the world’s Muslims unbelievers, which explains why they never condemn the deaths of innocent Muslims during jihadist attacks in Iraq, Afghanistan, Indonesia or the United States.

Finally, jihadis in Europe believe in participating in violence around the world and in inciting or at the very least financing others to do so. Jihadist leaders in Britain, Germany, Turkey, France and elsewhere have been very active in recruiting young Muslims to fight in wars around the world: Kashmir and Chechnya in particular, and later in Afghanistan and Iraq, and in declaring that this violence must continue until their version of Islam dominates the world.

There are however certain characteristics that make European jihadism distinct from jihadism elsewhere. Until recently Europe was a welcoming home for many jihadis who took advantage of European openness to thousands of legitimate Muslim refugees seeking political asylum. Thus, whereas men such as Mullah Krekar, Umar Bakri Muhammad or Abu Hamza would have been prosecuted or even executed in their own states, they were able to find not only refuge in Europe, but also a platform for recruiting others, preaching their hatred, and inciting attacks.

At the same time, jihadist leaders always sent their followers to commit acts of violence outside the countries that gave them refuge. This was for both religious as well as practical reasons; jihadis argued that they had a covenant of security with these countries and that it would severely curtail their freedom of maneuver if they were implicated in any violence. However, after the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq jihadist leaders began to tell their followers that countries such as Spain and Britain had betrayed this covenant and were no longer protected from attacks. The final blow in Britain was the decision to arrest and prosecute Abu Hamza—his trial began Tuesday July 9 and the bombings in London came two days later. One should not imagine, by the way, that it was solely for British or Spanish support of the war in Iraq that these terrorist atrocities were committed: jihadis in Spain were prepared to carry out at least three more attacks even after the Spanish government withdrew its troops from Iraq.

In closing I would like to say that I believe that, despite the very good police and intelligence work done by countries throughout Europe, jihadism is a growing threat to Europe. This is for several reasons. Perhaps most importantly, the underlying causes of radicalism (Muslim alienation from their European homes, unemployment, and other factors) have not been adequately dealt with. Secondly, jihadis, unlike moderate Muslims, believe in proselytizing.

This means that jihadist leaders actively seek young disillusioned Muslims and work very hard to recruit them, winning them away from their traditional beliefs to a radicalism that promises answers to all their problems. Thirdly, when moderate imams attempt to rein the radicals in, jihadis have no qualms about using threats and violence against their own community. This has created an atmosphere of intimidation that is making it difficult for moderate and liberal Muslims to counter the appeals of the jihadis. Finally, jihadis around the world have now made Europe one of their legitimate targets and believe that they now have the right to attack whenever possible. This means that the relative safety and security of European countries could be a thing of the past and we may see more attacks such as those in London and Madrid in the near future.

Thank you.