

“Combating al-Qaeda and the Militant Jihadist Threat”

**The United States House of Representatives
Committee on Armed Services
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Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, for the opportunity to appear before you to share with you my views on combating al-Qaeda and the militant jihadist threat. I will focus my remarks on two key issues and then suggest some policy options.

- I. The threat posed by militant Islam is neither new nor solely military in nature; instead, the challenge is primarily an ideological one. Unless we understand this ideology that gives rise to extremist violence, we will not succeed in defeating either the terrorists or the “non-violent” Islamists who seek to trigger a clash with the West.
- II. Western Europe has become a central battlefield in the war of ideas within Islam between moderates and radicals. For decades, radicals have taken advantage of the legal and societal openness of Western Europe to strengthen their organizations and spread their ideas—and furthermore to export radical ideas and radical activities to Muslim lands. The continuing inability of the West to differentiate between moderates and radicals is resulting in the legitimization of radicals and the isolation of moderates. The failure to effectively integrate its Muslim citizens, coupled with the eventual return from Iraq of European Muslims with experience in armed jihad, will lead to even more serious problems in the future—both for Europe and the U.S.

I. Militant Islam—the Challenge of Ideology

Four years after the beginning of the “global war against terror,” many in the United States still do not know who the enemies are—let alone how they are organized or how best to respond to their activities. Without an essential understanding of who is on the other side, it will be simply impossible to achieve victory in this long-term struggle.

So far, the principal tools being used by the United States and its allies are the military, intelligence, and law-enforcement bodies. These agencies have carried out a wide range of operations from military strikes in Afghanistan and Iraq to financial measures against the flow of funds to terrorist organizations. Although such methods do reduce the ability of the terrorists to strike again they reflect a narrow conception of the enemy in this war. The essential problem is the rapid spread of an ideology that is diametrically opposed to the democratic capitalist system

and the Western conception of freedom. This ideology exploits certain Islamic teachings in order to push the global Muslim community, or *umma*, into bringing down the existing world order.

It is essential to understand that this ideology has thus far not succeeded. Islam and the West are not engaged in a clash of civilizations—at least not yet. However, the West is being drawn into the battle between two competing ideologies within the Islamic world. Proponents of the first, which holds that Islam is compatible with secular democracy and with the protection of basic civil liberties, benefit from the support of a majority of the Muslim population—and from the rich historical and theological legacy of moderate Islam. Proponents of the second are committed to replacing the existing world order with a global Islamic state, or caliphate; in order to make this vision a reality, they wish to trigger a broader clash of civilizations within which all Muslims will be forced to choose religious affiliation over all other sources of identity.

While attention over the last four years has focused on the activities of well-known terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda, Hamas, Hezbollah, and Jemaah Islamiyah, insufficient attention has been paid to the ideological and theological aspects of their challenge to the West. Terrorism is only one tool of many in the Islamist arsenal. In order to maintain focus in what will undoubtedly be a long-term struggle, one must keep in mind the political objective that the terrorists are trying to obtain. To concentrate solely on the violent manifestations of this political campaign is to risk prolonging the war against radical extremism indefinitely. Instead, the focus must equally be on combating the *ideology* of radical extremism and on those who propagate it. As Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld noted in an October 2003 memo, the question “are we winning or losing the global war on terror” must be asked in the following way: “Are we capturing, killing or deterring and dissuading more terrorists every day than the madrassas and the radical clerics are recruiting, training and deploying against us?”¹ The answer is clearly no.

While it only attracted the attention of American policymakers after September 11, 2001, this war of ideologies is far from recent in origin. This tension has persisted from the early years of Islamic history, when radicals seeking to expand the faith through violent conquest clashed with those desiring to develop Islam through peaceful means. For most of this history, however, the intolerant element was consigned to minority and even pariah status. Indeed, it was only thanks to the unique political and economic conditions of the early twentieth century that radical Islamism emerged from relative obscurity into the potent force it is today.

Before addressing the development of this ideology, it is necessary first to outline the primary divisions within Islam and Islamic thought. Within Sunni Islam, the majority sect, there are four main schools, or madhabs, of Islamic jurisprudence: Hanafi, Hanbali, Shafi'i and Maliki. Together, they encompass a significant majority of Muslims. Outside the four schools, however, lies the Salafi (from the Arabic for “predecessors”) movement, which rejects many mainstream Islamic traditions as “polytheistic” or as “innovations,” in favor of what it views as “pure” Islam. Within the broader Salafi movement, inspired by the thirteenth-century Syrian theologian Ibn Taymiya, is to be found the yet more extreme Wahhabi sect, named after the eighteenth-century thinker Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab. At the most extreme end of the spectrum of those who follow Wahhab include terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda, Hamas, and Islamic Jihad. However, organizations that use different tactics also share this same ideology. Organizations

¹ “Rumsfeld’s War on Terror Memo,” *USA Today*, October 22, 2003

like Hizb ut-Tahrir, Tablighi Jam'aat and the Muslim Brotherhood are equally part of this theological and political grouping; none of them can be called "moderate," as they have all distorted mainstream, classical Islamic traditions for narrowly political ends.

It is now widely known that, since the oil boom of the 1970s, Saudi Arabia has spent over \$80 billion to promote Wahhabism—money that has been spent on funding leading terrorist and other extremist organizations that disseminate hatred in "educational centers," charities, mosques, and even prisons—including many here in the United States. Although Wahhabism's place in Islam is sometimes considered similar to that of American Protestantism within Christianity, in reality it is only a minority radical religious cult, fueled by petrodollars. As historian Bernard Lewis more correctly contends, "Wahhabis teaching Islam is like the KKK teaching Christianity."

Indeed, it is symptomatic of a greater problem that political Islamism has come to represent the Islamic mainstream in Western eyes. This recognition has allowed Wahhabis to act against the moderate Muslim majority virtually unnoticed. The reality is that Wahhabis (and Salafi groups more generally) have for decades been in an open-ended war against classical Islam. This is not just a metaphorical war; Wahhabis are obsessed with erasing the physical record of mainstream Muslim traditions, such as mausoleums, tombstones, and Sufi shrines. In fact, Wahhabis have demolished many Ottoman-era mosques in order to expunge the Islamic world of any remaining element of cultural and religious diversity—thus reinforcing their contention that there is no form of Islam other than their own. The Taliban's destruction of temples in Afghanistan, the attacks on Shiite shrines in Iraq, and the Saudi demolishing of the Prophet Mohammed's house in Mecca (along with hundreds of mausoleums belonging to his companions) are all indications that these groups care not at all about Islam, its common values, and its common heritage—and thus, that they are extremely dangerous.

In order to answer in more detail the question of precisely how political Islamic movements have been able to gain strength in the modern context, I would like to call attention to an excellent case study: that of Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT), the Islamic Party of Liberation, which was founded in 1953 by the Palestinian judge Sheikh Taqiuddin al-Nabhani. Drawing on the work of Taymiya, Wahhab, and more recent Salafists such as Sayyid Qutb, Nabhani rejected all "modern" political systems; to him, capitalism was exploitative, and democracy was godless. He asserted that the only way to reestablish the kind of Islamic society promulgated by the Prophet was to liberate Muslims from the thoughts, systems, and laws of *kufir* (nonbelievers) and replace the nation-state system with a borderless *umma* ruled by a new caliph, or Islamic ruler.

Nabhani viewed Western civilization and Islam as mutually exclusive systems vying for ideological dominance within Muslim societies. Both capitalism and socialism were anathema, he argued, since both failed to recognize the primacy of Islam. Guided by its founder's beliefs, HT took the fall of communism in stride, identifying Western democratic capitalism as the primary remaining impediment to the establishment of a truly Islamic society. However much HT despises the existing governments in the Muslim world, it is accordingly no fan of U.S. efforts to "promote democracy," considering them only as the latest manifestation of the West's permanent animosity toward Islam. To HT and its followers, "the war on terrorism" is a euphemism for a total war against Islam.

HT is devoted not to direct action but to ideological struggle. Its aim is to overthrow Western and Muslim governments and re-establish the Caliphate. While HT as an organization does not engage in terrorist activities, its ideology encourages its followers to commit terrorist acts. HT's global networks directly convey the radical Islamist message to Muslims on the ground and deliver this message in each country's native language. The party has thus significantly militarized the ideological space in Muslim societies. Until a few years ago, most Islamist groups considered the notion of establishing a new caliphate a utopian goal. Today, however, as individuals such as Osama bin Laden or Abu Musab al-Zarqawi make constant references to a caliphate, an increasing number of people consider it a serious long-term objective. Also, after decades of stressing the existence and unity of the global Islamic *umma*, HT is beginning to convince Muslims that their primary identity stems from (and that their primary loyalty is owed to) religion rather than race, ethnicity, or nationality.

In its effort to re-create the caliphate, HT seeks to emulate the method adopted by the Prophet Muhammad when he established the first Islamic state. According to the group's interpretation, the Prophet did so in three stages: first, by patiently disseminating ideas, next by organizing followers, and only then moving to seize power. HT thus envisions a three-step process of its own. HT's focus in the first stage is on building the party, a goal accomplished by recruitment and propaganda. Recruitment methods vary from country to country, but HT members generally seek out young people with existential questions and bring them into the party's circle. Prospective candidates are formally introduced to the party apparatus by interacting with a study group; most join to learn about Islam in general but over time are indoctrinated with HT's interpretation of Islamic political history and are "purged" of all "non-Islamic" thoughts. New members are required to take the HT membership oath, which includes a commitment to "carry out even those decisions of the party leaders that I find objectionable." By the end of their apprenticeships, which can last from six months to three years, HT members are ideologically and spiritually prepared to deal with any hardship that may befall them as they embark on the struggle.

During the second stage of HT's grand plan—which the group has reached in most of the countries in which it operates—members form new cells and try to create tension between governments and their peoples. Members are asked to modify their behavior so as to blend in with the population around them and infiltrate the government. When the second stage is complete, the ground will supposedly be ripe for an Islamic revolution to establish a state ruled by sharia. The third stage will be reached, the group believes, when the *umma* embraces HT's interpretation of Islam and all the implications associated with it. Unlike most global jihadist groups, HT believes it can carry out the political revolution in a nonviolent manner, relying on the penetration of government institutions and the recruitment of key officials.

In sum, Hizb ut-Tahrir presents a set of threats to U.S. interests, centering on its role in providing ideological and theological justification (and thus inspiration) to terrorists. Combined with the efforts of its more radical splinter groups, HT contributes to the separation of Muslims from the West, and to the growth of anti-Americanism and anti-Semitism. The materials it posts on the Internet or the instructions it distributes in leaflets can incite those not part of the HT network to establish radical organizations of their own. Moreover, if HT ever succeeds in gaining control of

a given state, the result would be a disaster both for the country in question and for American interests more generally.

Such a result is not altogether out of the question, since HT's momentum is increasing rapidly. Although it has been engaged in the war of ideologies for over half a century, HT has recently made enormous progress using the most modern medium: the Internet. Indeed, the Internet's global reach is ideally suited to a group that denies the legitimacy of political borders. HT's Web sites can be easily accessed by Muslims anywhere—particularly those living in repressive societies.

HT has for decades been “the only political party wanting to unite the *umma*,” as opposed to merely uniting the Muslims of a single nation-state. This objective of creating a transnational Islamic identity did not have much success until recently. Since the Iraq war, however, HT has made serious progress as the main combatant in the “war of ideas”. The attacks in Afghanistan and Iraq helped radical Islamists mobilize their followers by arguing that since “Muslims and Islam are under attack,” armed jihad is their responsibility. President Bush's reminder that “this crusade, this war on terrorism, will take a while,” to Muslim ears sounded like America was waging the final phase of a war against Islam that had begun in the medieval era. The perception that the U.S. wants to destroy Islamic civilization was further reinforced by pictures and video of American attacks against mosques and other holy sites in Iraq and elsewhere.

The most recent cartoon crisis provided a further strategic opportunity to the Islamists to claim that they were right, since the West is indeed in a war against Islam—after all, how could one explain the portrayal of Prophet Mohammad wearing a turban shaped as a bomb with a burning fuse? HT's February 4 statement released in London, entitled “Defending the Honor of the Prophet (s.a.w.): A message to the Muslim Community” is instructive: “This is not about free speech...The offensive representation of the Noble Prophet with a bomb is a clear indication that once again the link is being made between Islam and 'terrorism'.Abu Ghraib, desecrating the Qur'an and now depicting the Prophet (s.a.w.) as a terrorist, confirms clearly what this war is about. It is not about security, it is about attacking Islam because it now stands as the only credible alternative to the decades of colonialism of the Muslim world.”

Such public statements made in Britain, a key ally in the war against radical extremism, bring me to my second point: that Western Europe has become a central battlefield in the war of ideas within Islam between the moderates and radicals.

II. Europe—Central Battlefield in the War of Ideas

Since the 1970s, Europe has become a breeding ground for radicals. Unable to develop their organizations or spread their ideas in their home countries due to repressive government policies, radical imams and activists moved to Europe. Once in Europe, they exploited the protections of European laws—notably the freedoms of speech and assembly—and heavily recruited followers in mosques and schools. In time, they were able to re-export their radical ideology back to their countries of origin. Until recently, Europeans tacitly permitted this activism; under the implicit “covenant of security,” radicals could do whatever they wished in the Islamic world, so long as they did nothing to destabilize Europe itself. London in particular served as a “nerve center” for

groups such as HT, which held conferences and demonstrations throughout the city and produced radical literature that was sent to Muslim lands.

Thus, for the last three decades Europe essentially turned a blind eye to what was happening to the Muslim population in its midst. Believing that the Muslim immigrants would eventually “go back home,” European policymakers ignored the fact that radical imams were influencing their own citizens. Worse, Muslims remained segregated from the rest of the society—further increasing the attractiveness of a transnational radical ideology to second- and third-generation immigrants from Muslim countries.

Today Muslims make up about 5% of the EU population of 460 million, and represent the fastest-growing demographic group within that 25-nation bloc. It is within this growing population that the internal Muslim war of ideas is being fought—and currently being won by the radicals. They are doing so not solely because governments have failed to combat the rise and activity of extremist groups. Central to the challenge posed by radicalism is the widespread inability of European states to promote lasting integration of their Muslim citizens. While governments are finally recognizing the need to develop more effective models of integration, this is happening at a time when Muslims feel increasingly distant from their host societies.

Europe’s difficulty with absorbing and assimilating Muslim immigrants has left many Muslims without a sense of belonging and purpose—a sense that Islamists can and do provide. At home in the virtually all Muslim ghetto neighborhoods, Muslims learn religious traditions and values. At school and in other social settings, they learn the ways of secularism. Confused about their identity, they become attracted to the Islamist groups, which are able to provide them with answers. The increasingly anti-Muslim mood in Western Europe further leads Muslims to feel they must adopt an identity that is prescribed and defined by others. If they are perceived first as Muslims (and only second, if ever, as Europeans), and if that identity is equated with terrorism, radicalism and even backwardness, then European Muslims are further tempted by the pride promised by radical ideology—thus turning from rebels without a cause into rebels with one.

The challenge of integrating Muslims into secular European societies is further complicated by the dearth of moderate imams who can reach out to those who feel alienated from their societies. Instead, the mosques of Europe are filled with radical clerics whose views and activities are inimical to European security interests. The most well-known case is Abu Hamza al-Masri of Britain, who has been urging followers to kill non-Muslims. While Muslim communities in Europe have complained about this situation for years, it is only after 9/11 that Europeans have begun to pay attention.

Islamists utilize a variety of recruitment measures. Even if they are banned on university campuses, they elude the oversight of university authorities either by attempting to register organizations under false names, or by setting up stalls outside the campus. They also distribute hateful propaganda at mosques and Islamic centers, using them as indoctrination centers. As mentioned earlier, the internet is also widely used to wage the “war of ideas.” In what is called “cut-and-paste Islam,” second and third generation Muslims become radicalized over the internet.

As a result, following the July bombings in Britain, a classified MI5 document leaked to the press discussed the possibility of an “all-out Islamic insurgency” followed by a serious backlash against Muslims in the UK. A government report in the Netherlands analyzed the potential for conflict involving the country’s Muslim minority—and concluded that many of the conditions that have fostered violence in other countries are also present there. These conditions included: the presence of a destructive, exclusive ideology; the widespread perception of injustice; the absence of a shared narrative between the minority and the majority; the prevalence of dehumanization of the “other;” and the mutual feelings of anger and victimization among both groups—along with the resulting desire for revenge.

In this context, the eventual return of the European fighters in Iraq will undoubtedly complicate matters further. There are various estimates of the number of European passport holders fighting in Iraq; most indicate it is at least several hundred. Most European governments do not know if their citizens are in Iraq, as most of them go via third countries. Given the ease by which militants can move within the EU, these jihadists will pose huge security risks to the continent—and indeed, to the US; after all, European passport holders usually enjoy visa-free access to the United States. Like the mujahideen in Afghanistan, Bosnia and Chechnya, these fighters become ideologically so transformed by their wartime experience, and so deeply believe that the U.S. and its allies are “enemies of Islam,” that they are then eager to use their military and guerrilla tactics and techniques in new combat zones.

As the London bombings demonstrated, terror attacks can also be carried by assimilated, middle-class European Muslims. In fact, what is painfully clear is that the West is not able to handle the problem at hand: in another recently leaked MI5 document the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC) admitted that it “know[s] little about...how and when the attackers were recruited, the extent of any external direction or assistance and the extent and role of any wider network.”²

How is this lack of knowledge possible over four years after 9/11?

First, American and Western policymakers and security analysts have traditionally worked within a system incapable of handling religious extremism. They are faced with conservative Muslims who do not actively take part in politics and with Muslim extremists who regard liberal democracy itself as *haram*, a system forbidden by God and destined for destruction. As one of the suspected members of the Dutch Hofstad terrorist group declared in court, “We reject you. We reject your system. We hate you and that’s about it.” There is an inherent difficulty faced by a secular system in comprehending and responding to a threat posed by extreme interpretations of religion. Furthermore, governments have long found themselves nearly powerless to act against radicals, who operate with almost complete freedom due to outdated legal and security mechanisms.

Second, European policymakers have awakened to the dangers of Muslim alienation, but have not recognized the need for their Muslim citizens to play a meaningful and respected role in the civic and political life of their countries of residence. Many European countries are only now beginning a painful debate over the effectiveness of multiculturalism, the policies of which have often served to sweep the social needs of Muslim communities under the rug—reflecting a deep

² David Leppard, “MI5 Admits: We’ve run out of leads on bombers”, *The Sunday Times*. January 29, 2006.

prejudice that European values must be applied only to “native” Europeans. The continent still faces a long-term struggle to reconnect with its marginalized communities—one similar to that of the United States during the century stretching from the Civil War to the civil rights movement.

Third, Europeans have been even slower to address the need to reverse the trend towards spiritual alienation among Muslim immigrants. European officials lack the knowledge and theological authority to shape religious attitudes within Muslim communities, and are often incapable of distinguishing moderates from extremists who cloak themselves in tolerant rhetoric.

It is often argued that neither the origin nor the cure of the issue is in Europe. In other words, it would be futile to focus on the future of Islam in Europe as the way Islam will develop will be determined in the Middle East. To suggest that a European Islam can be nurtured, or even that European Muslims could help trigger reforms in the Middle East and North Africa, is seen as a ludicrous proposition. Such views reflect a common error: conflating the concepts of the Middle East and the Muslim world. The challenges of the modern Middle East—from Iraq to Palestine, and from oil to terrorism—have already captured the vast majority of world attention for years and years. However, only 18% of Muslims live in the Middle East. The vast majority of Muslims live in societies far removed from the unique societies of the broader Arabian Peninsula. In Syria, Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere, local Islamic traditions have developed in response to certain stimuli, such as Western colonialism and support for local dictators. Accordingly, these Muslims often carry significant resentment towards the West—resentment that Bin Laden, Zarqawi, and others have sought to foster as a necessary component of Islam. Yet, however tangible these local grievances, they should *not* be confused with the long and rich traditions of a multi-national and multi-cultural religion.

Indeed, the Middle East has not had an exclusive hold on a leadership role within the broader Islamic world. From the medieval kingdom of Al-Andalus in Spain to that of Bukhara in Central Asia; and from the Muslim societies of India, Indonesia, and Malaysia to Turkey and the Balkans, there have long been centers of reformation, renaissance, and enlightenment within Islam that are *outside* the traditional “Islamic heartland” of the Middle East. Recognizing the need to co-exist and to understand “the other” in order to facilitate trade and interaction, these Muslim societies made great advancements in economics, science, technology, and theology. As inheritors to all of these traditions, especially that of Ottoman Turkey, European Muslims can very well contribute to a new renaissance in the Islamic world as they discover new ways of reconciling their faith within the modern European context.

European Muslims are “in tune” with their home societies, which are themselves increasingly in tune with European Muslims. The relationship between the two Muslim communities is dynamic and interactive—and has the potential to become even more so. For example, Europe serves as an attractive refuge for prominent Muslims such as the Egyptian scholar Nasr Abu Zayd, who have made notable contributions to the broader debate within Islam. Moreover, many Muslims—notably Iranians—have left their repressive societies and went to Europe to practice their version of Islam. If Muslims in Europe can find a way to achieve active integration within European societies, the benefits will flow back to the Middle East along the same international networks that currently spread messages of extremism and hate.

Moreover, even if any ultimate reform of Islam must encompass the Middle East, Europe cannot wait for that reform to gradually take shape. Given the slow speed at which reforms in the Middle East are taking place, as well as the urgency of the problems posed by radical extremism, Europeans have no option but to nurture the birth of a European Islam. Put simply, Europe cannot wait until the Wahhabis and Salafis of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and elsewhere have changed their ways. Of course, Europeans are constrained in their actions; they cannot single-handedly reform the politics and societies of the Middle East. But they can and must act to integrate their own citizens into a tolerant, multi-ethnic society. The challenge is thus to help Europe develop responses to the threat of Islamist extremism while avoiding the temptation of a harsh reaction that would set back the cause of interfaith relations worldwide.

In other words, while there is a need to compensate for decades of the multiculturalist policy of good intentions, the new emphasis on assimilation is beginning to overcompensate for it. In short, if the current trend continues, the pendulum risks swinging too far in the opposite direction.

III. Policy Recommendations

A. Confronting radicalism in Europe

European governments that have been confronted with “crises” like the Madrid and London bombings, the riots in the French immigrant suburbs and the murder of the Dutch filmmaker Theo Van Gogh, as well as the recent Danish cartoon incident, realize that they have to improve their efforts to address immigration, integration and extremism. Yet, in doing so they find it extremely difficult to maintain a careful balance in the triangular relationship between state/government, mainstream “majority” society, and minority communities, as mutual mistrust and fear have grown substantially. It is not easy to promote integration and at the same time counter extremism, when extremists are or are perceived to be receiving passive support or acquiescence from Muslim communities. At the same time, as a recent report by the Dutch intelligence service AIVD points out, there is an increase in right-wing extremism among Dutch youths who feel threatened in their identity by (Muslim) immigrants.

Thus, what is now needed is a third approach that takes the best out of multiculturalism and assimilation and simultaneously works along two tracks to develop a genuinely *European* Islam. The first track recognizes the need for European societies to actively reexamine and reassert their basic values and laws—as well as the need to defend them through cultural, educational, judicial, police and military means. The second track focuses on integration, by building an inclusive culture based on the common European cement of democracy, the rule of law, and human rights. In the new approach, Europe must move away from the exclusive shared narratives of its nationalist past, and allow for differences of religion and outlook to be *included* under a broader concept of what it means to be European. It should have a firm and non-negotiable core of political and social principles, but should also feature an outer shell porous enough to allow “us” and “them” to come together. Although it will be a difficult balancing act to reconcile the non-negotiable with the porous, the essence of the European project has been reflected in its motto: *In Varietate Concordia* (“Unity in Diversity”)—a motto that should resonate in a country framed according to the principles of *E Pluribus Unum*.

A European Islam that reconciles the tenets of religion with the democratic and liberal principles of the European Union will only be possible if governments in both the United States and Europe learn to be both tough and soft at the same time: tough on radicalism, while soft and respectful in dialogue. Caught between the radicalism of its own Enlightenment and the radicalism of modern Islamism, Europe desperately needs such a new approach—a “European way” by which it can encourage its 20 million Muslims to become full European citizens, while refusing to compromise its fundamental principles.

The United States can help Europe in this historic challenge in two key ways. First, it can share its own experience of successfully integrating its Muslims—thanks to the concept of what it means to be an “American” and the possibilities offered to people of all ethnic, religious and national backgrounds by the American Dream.

Second, the U.S. can help Europe look at Turkey in a new light: As the country of origin for almost four million European Muslims, as a trusted NATO ally that recently twice commanded NATO’s ISAF operation in Afghanistan, and as a candidate for EU membership, Turkey has several valuable lessons to offer Europeans—Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

First, the liberal approach to Islam taken by the Ottomans is not very well known in Europe. Despite the claims of groups such as Al-Qaeda and HT, the Ottoman Caliphate did not resemble the extremist utopian vision promulgated today. In the Islamist view of an ideal society, non-Muslims should at best hold the status of second-class citizens. Meanwhile, the Ottomans granted non-Muslims the status of *dhimmi* (“protected people”), preserving the Christian communities of Greece and the Balkans under its suzerainty. It later became a haven for persecuted peoples such as Jews fleeing the Spanish Inquisition. Later on, as it reformed, the Ottoman state abolished the *dhimmi* status entirely, extending full citizenship to all non-Muslims. These changes were undertaken with the full approval of the religious leaders of Ottoman society. Full knowledge of these historical truths is important to Europeans and Americans as they seek to defeat the propaganda of radical groups.

Second, Turkey is even more essential in countering the pan-Islamist rejection of integration with European society. Currently, Islamists tell Muslims that they are permitted to steal from the “infidels” and to ignore European laws not based in sharia. However, this notion is not based in Islamic teachings, finding its roots instead in post-colonial resentments of the North African and South Asian communities. Since they do not share this colonial past, and have instead enjoyed seventy years of relative prosperity and stability under a Western legal system in their own homeland, Turkish Muslims can demonstrate the compatibility of Western democracy and Islamic faith.

Third, the unique organizational system of Turkish Islam merits examining for potential relevance to European Islam. For over eighty years, Turkish Islam has coexisted with a secular state largely due to the unique institution of the Diyanet. At once public, independent, and civic, the Diyanet is not very well understood. Enjoying freedom of inquiry and scholarship, the Diyanet derives its authority and respect from its expertise in Islamic knowledge and scholarship. Responsible for 75,000 mosques within Turkey as well as the religious communities of the

Turkish diaspora, the Diyanet promotes a moderate interpretation of Islam via its training programs for imam and in its religious scholarship. All Diyanet imams are required to complete a college education, and to pass cultural and linguistic examinations—thus protecting Turks against the dangers of radical preaching. Although Europeans have raised several objections to the Diyanet model—from its close links to the government to its often firm control over Turkish mosques within Europe itself—these concerns may be alleviated as the Diyanet continues its own internal reform process. As Turkey continues its accession negotiations with the EU, Europe will be able to provide input into this reform process. It would be also beneficial if the Diyanet, with its extensive experience and rich store of theological expertise, is allowed input into the reform and development of European Islam.

It is certainly true that some aspects of the Turkish case cannot, for reasons of history and local circumstances, be replicated either in Europe or in other Islamic countries. However, some elements have the potential to be applied elsewhere. For example, unlike its Wahhabist or Salafi counterparts, Turkish Islam has traditionally held that there is no fundamental incompatibility between the teachings of Islam and the principles of democracy. Standing firm against those calling for sharia, Hacı Karacaer, leader of the Turkish-Dutch organization Northern Milli Gorus, has publicly declared that, “As I believe in Allah, I believe in Dutch justice; the Dutch Constitution is my sharia.” It is critically important for Europe’s future that such views become mainstream Muslim approaches.

B. The broader struggle

Ultimately, combating the spread of militant Islam will only be successfully achieved when the West is able to win Muslim hearts and minds. The Islamists have provided Muslims with a compelling explanation for why the Islamic world has fallen behind the West in recent centuries. They also offer a simple remedy: close the gap by destroying the existing order. In this view, the end of history has not been reached with democracy—it will only be reached when Islam prevails.

The United States (and the West more generally) was able to achieve victory in the last epic ideological struggle, the Cold War, only after coming up with a durable strategy based on thorough study of communist ideology and tactics. That strategy was to contain the enemy’s military threat while offering a better ideological alternative, one based on political and personal freedom combined with economic prosperity.

It is imperative to recognize that another such struggle is unfolding and that it requires a comparably durable strategy. Today, however, the target population is well aware of the basic Western alternative and is largely rejecting it. More and more Muslims—and not just terrorists—believe that they will always be unequal players in the Western system. They believe America’s “freedom and democracy agenda” is merely a trick to placate them so that the United States can maintain its global hegemony. Instead of acquiescing, they argue, Muslims need to unite and rise up to reclaim their former glory. The international political structure of the Cold War has thus been turned on its head: just as the United States did for dissidents behind the Iron Curtain, so today the Islamists raise hope among disaffected Muslims of a dignified alternative to their perceived oppression.

The first task in countering this challenge is to deprive the Islamists of the ability to discredit the United States and the West. This will not be easy. In the wake of the war in Iraq and the treatment of prisoners at Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo Bay, the credibility and moral authority of the United States and its allies in the Muslim world is at an all-time low. In fact, rehabilitating America's image will probably take decades and require an ideological campaign highlighting values common to the Western and Muslim worlds. President Bush's "forward strategy of freedom" will never be received as well as an approach stressing justice and dignity, concepts that resonate much more strongly in Muslim societies.

The best allies in this struggle are moderate Muslims; they need to be given political space so that mainstream Islam is no longer in the hands of the radicals, with the moderates pushed to the sides of the debate. Neither the U.S. nor European countries can engage in a battle of ideas within Islam; they can, however, support the real moderates so these people can, as former Indonesian president Abdurrahman Wahid argued in a recent article, "propagate an understanding of the 'right' Islam, and thereby discredit extremist ideology."³

To enable the moderates to recapture the mainstream—which will take at least as much time and money as it took the Wahhabis and the Salafis—it is important to find ways to suppress the activities Islamists and militant organizations, albeit without sacrificing too many civil liberties. It is essential that Western governments recognize that the Islamists have taken advantage of the West's own freedoms of speech, assembly, and the like to spread hate-filled, anti-Semitic, and anti-constitutional ideas and created a fifth column of activists working to undermine the very systems under which they live. Then they must find ways to protect their societies not just from terrorism but also from the indirect incitement.

The glorification and encouragement of suicide bombers, the dissemination of justifications for violence, and the development of support networks for militant activities create a critical, if barely visible, ideological infrastructure that enables the more explosive actions of Islamist radicals that actually make the headlines.

While our military campaign against armed extremists must continue, we must remain focused on dismantling the ideological infrastructure of our enemies; otherwise, Western societies will never be fully secure.

³ Abdurrahman Wahid, "Right Islam vs. Wrong Islam," *Wall Street Journal*, December 30, 2005