

**Opening Remarks by Hon Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, Chair
Subcommittee on the Middle East and Central Asia
for hearing: “Is there a Clash of Civilizations: Islam, Democracy, and U.S Policy in
the Middle East and Central Asia?”
2200 Rayburn Building, 10:00 a.m.**

A few days ago, we commemorated a solemn anniversary-- the fifth anniversary of the deplorable attacks against our nation.

Five years ago, our eyes could not accept the images being shown around the world. Our mind could not fathom the hatred that could drive these individuals to kill thousands of innocent human beings. At first, we were surprised, but we quickly turned our sorrow, dismay, and anger into a catalyst for action—a strategy to combat the enemy wherever it rears its head.

Central to defeating the fanatics is the realization that we are facing an enemy that has declared a full-fledged war on us and is determined to destroy Western Civilization and the principles upon which it is based.

To defeat this enemy and ensure that freedom prevails today, as democracy prevailed over communism in the last century, we must truly understand the nature of an evolving enemy. We must understand the mindset of these radicals-- their rules and their view of the battlefield—in order for our strategies to be fully effective.

Are we, in fact, engaged in a clash of civilizations, with the Middle East and Central Asia as the central front in this struggle?

What should U.S. policy focus on in order to combat Islamist extremism's mounting offensive against those who refuse to espouse their radical ideology?

According to Samuel Huntington, the creator of the “clash of civilizations” theory, the primary source of conflict in the post-Cold War world, will be triggered by cultural and religious conflicts, rather than political and economic. The principal conflicts will occur between “groups of different civilizations.” In particular, Huntington focuses on the clash between the “West” and “Islam.” Huntington argues that this conflict is based on the recent emergence of radical Islam and terrorism, as well as the long history of military confrontation between the Middle East and Europe.

Some question the applicability of this theory to the current struggle against Islamist terrorism, given the absence of a core state. But what of state-sponsors of terrorism such as Iran and Syria? How should we view Iran's long-standing desire to export its Islamic revolution and exert itself as a regional, if not global, power? How does Iran affect the ideology of destruction espoused by jihadists?

Others, who disagree with Huntington's theory, argue that his analysis overly generalizes Islam and overlooks important religious, cultural, and ethnic differences between Muslims.

One such critic is Daniel Pipes, director of the Middle East Forum and a prize-winning columnist. Pipes opposes Huntington's theory that Islam is fundamentally at odds with the Western civilization, and argues that the problem is rooted in radical Islam rather than Islam as a whole.

Others, such as Dr. Wafa Sultan, describe the current struggle as "a battle between modernity and barbarism." Dr. Wafa Sultan is a Syrian-American psychiatrist who has debated frequently on al-Jazeera and is facing constant death threats and grave security concerns for her criticism of radical Islam.

Mr. Tony Blankley, one of our distinguished panelists today, notes that the radical Muslim fundamentalists are: "postmodern, not pre-modern. They are designing a distinctly Western, fascistic version of Islam that is less and less connected to the Islam of their Middle Eastern homeland."

But there are degrees of radicalism.

Some are prepared to murder in what they feel is their religious duty. Others are supportive or protective of these jihadists. Still others, do not embrace the tactics employed by the jihadists but share the convictions and perceptions of the extremists.

Thus, how can U.S. strategies be crafted to address these different levels of involvement and support?

For example, experts say that many Islamist terrorist groups pledge allegiance to al-Qaeda but are not directly linked to this terrorist entity. What is it that binds them to al-Qaeda? What is it about bin Laden, other Islamist terrorist leaders, or the ideology itself, that attracts the recruits? How much of the ideology of destruction that drives these Islamofascists is rooted in faith? In politics? In personal vengeance for any socio-economic ills that may have befallen the jihadists or their relatives?

Is one entity focused on the global strategy, while other Islamist terrorist groups use that to achieve individual, country-specific objectives?

Ultimately, according to Huntington, the reality we face is: "A West at the peak of its power confront[ing] non-Wests that increasingly have the desire, the will and the resources to shape the world in non-Western ways."

But is it the West, in the traditional sense that is the target or is the target the growing coalition of democracies and governments aspiring to create free, democratic societies?

In short, who and what is the enemy? What emboldens and strengthens the enemy? What can undermine and destroy the enemy in the long-term?

We hope today's discussion, taking place in the shadow of the fifth anniversary of the September 11th attacks, will help us remember the brutal nature of these extremists and will provide us greater insight into on their nature, in order to refine our policies and defeat them.

We must never, never forget. We must remain vigilant. The enemy is just waiting for us to flinch, before its agents descend like vultures to prey on our weakness.

We thank the witnesses appearing before us today and honor all who are at the forefront of this battle of ideas.