

Prepared Statement by Senator Chuck Grassley of Iowa
Chairman, Senate Judiciary Committee
Subcommittee on Oversight, Agency Action, Federal Rights and Federal Courts
Hearing on “Willful Blindness: Consequences of Agency Efforts To Deemphasize Radical
Islam in Combating Terrorism”
June 28, 2016

The Orlando nightclub attack a few weeks ago was the most deadly terrorist attack on our soil since 9/11. Forty-nine Americans lost their lives, and 53 others were wounded. It’s right that we mourn those who perished and comfort their loved ones. But it’s also important to examine the many reasons why the Obama’s Administration’s response to ISIS, and to radical Islamic terrorism in general, has been a failure – so that we can start turning things around.

One key reason for this failure is the President’s resistance to facing the truth about threats to our country when they don’t line up neatly with his predetermined policies or preferred ideological narratives.

For example, the President was highly invested in winding down our military efforts to take the fight to the terrorists abroad. So, in January 2014, he dismissed ISIS as the “j.v.,” or junior varsity. But then ISIS promptly spent the next six months conquering territory within the security vacuum across Syria and Iraq.

Then as fears mounted, in November 2015, the President assured us that ISIS was “contained.” But then very next day, it inflicted the deadliest Islamic terrorist attacks in Europe in over a decade, a coordinated assault across Paris that killed 130 and injured over 350.

Another important aspect of the Obama Administration’s unwillingness to accept reality is its constant downplaying of the obvious connection between radical Islamic terrorism and the ongoing threats to our country.

If the Administration can’t – or won’t – acknowledge the threat for what it is, how can it possibly figure out how to destroy it? We must understand the motivations of our enemies in order to defeat them. This is the focus of the hearing today.

Instances of this “willful blindness” are almost too numerous to count. In 2009, the so-called “underwear bomber” reportedly confessed to working with Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula after attempting to blow up an airliner bound for Detroit. But a few days later, President Obama described him as an “isolated extremist.”

That same year, Nidal Hassan, a U.S. Army major and psychiatrist, fatally shot 13 people and injured more than 30 others at Fort Hood, all while shouting “Allahu Akbar!” He had been in contact with a radical Islamic cleric, Anwar al-Awlaki. Yet the Department of Defense reportedly treated these killings as “workplace violence.”

Finally, during the Orlando attack, the terrorist pledged his allegiance to the leader of ISIS by name. He referred to himself as an Islamic soldier. And he demanded that the United States stop

bombing Syria and Iraq. But shortly afterward, the President insisted that “I think we don’t yet know the motivations.” Days after that, the Attorney General suggested that the Administration may never be able to narrow the shooter’s purpose in carrying out the attack down to one motivation.

This is no way to confront an enemy. The Obama Administration simply must face the uncomfortable realities about the nature of threats we face.

On the other hand, certainly there’s no need to overstate the connection between the Islamic faith and these attacks. Islam is one of the world’s major religions, and its followers are overwhelmingly peaceful. Muslims across the globe are key allies of the United States. And Muslim Americans here at home serve proudly and with distinction in our military, law enforcement and in all walks of life. The United States has no quarrel with Islam.

But we most certainly must defend ourselves from those radical Islamists that turn to violence to achieve their goals. And the Obama Administration cannot let political correctness get in the way of doing so. Thank you for calling this important hearing, Senator Cruz.