



Committee on  
**HOMELAND SECURITY**  
Chairman Peter T. King

**Opening Statement**

December 4, 2012

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**Statement of Chairman Patrick Meehan (R-PA)  
Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence**

**“Terrorist Exploitation of Refugee Programs”**

**December 4, 2012**

**Remarks as Prepared**

I would like to welcome everyone to today’s hearing. I look forward to hearing from today’s witnesses from the Department of Homeland Security and the State Department. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank them for taking the time to be here with us today. You are all dedicated public servants and we thank you for the hard work you do on a day-to-day basis.

I know you have provided extensive briefings to my staff over the last year on this issue and I greatly appreciate your assistance on this important issue.

From 2004 to 2007, the insurgency in Iraq produced substantial civilian displacement and emigration from the country. In response to the growing humanitarian crisis, Congress passed legislation, which gave Iraqis who helped the U.S. government or military the opportunity to receive special refugee status and resettlement in the United States.

While the motivation behind creating these special immigrant categories were well intentioned, the fact remains that in May 2011, two Iraqi nationals

who were given refugee status and resettled in the U.S. were arrested and accused by the FBI of plotting to send weapons and money to Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI).

One of the men arrested had openly discussed his prior experience as an insurgent in Iraq and the IED attacks he participated against U.S. troops. The fingerprints of the other Iraqi refugee charged were traced by the FBI to a component of an unexploded IED that was recovered by U.S. forces in northern Iraq.

In the wake of these arrests, DHS Secretary Janet Napolitano and others have publicly acknowledged that security checks have been expanded to the more than 58,000 Iraqi refugees who had already been settled in the United States.

According to press reports this past February, intelligence indicates that the threat posed by refugees with ties to al Qaeda is much broader than was previously believed.

FBI Director Robert Mueller stated last year during Congressional testimony before the House Intelligence Committee that he continues to be concerned with "individuals who may have been resettled here in the United States that have some association with al Qaeda in Iraq." There are also reports that that immigration authorities have given the FBI roughly 300 names of Iraqi refugees for further investigation.

With the recent movement of AQI fighters into Syria and reports just yesterday of chemical weapons being moved, I am increasingly worried that terrorists may try to exploit various refugee resettlement programs via Turkey, Jordan or other countries where many refugees have fled to escape the bloodshed.

It is imperative that the interagency security screening process for refugees be formidable and credible.

The purpose of this hearing is to identify any remaining gaps in the security screening process that need to be remedied, and to ensure DHS and the State Department have the necessary tools and resources to ensure security.

It is concerning that neither Hammadi nor Alwan had worked for any U.S. organization in Iraq, yet both received refugee status for humanitarian reasons.

All this being said, I am glad to hear that the interagency security screening and adjudication processing for refugees has undergone a number of enhancements since it was initiated, particularly regarding intelligence and information sharing with the Intelligence Community.

In particular, I would like to call attention to the biographic check done in collaboration with the National Counterterrorism Center, known as Interagency Checks. I am encouraged that this security check is now required for all refugee applicants ages 14 to 65, regardless of nationality.

As we all know, the United States welcomes more refugees than any other country in the world. I think the U.S. government policy of resettling refugees, especially those who risked their lives helping our soldiers and diplomats, is important.

My goal today is to highlight these issues to ensure that security gaps are closed to prevent terrorists from infiltrating our refugee programs. Moreover, I want to ensure that the lessons learned from this breakdown are applied to the future adjudication of refugees from other high-risk nations.

Again, I thank the witnesses for their hard work on this important issue and for being here today.

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