



Committee on
HOMELAND SECURITY
Chairman Michael McCaul

Opening Statement

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**Statement of Chairman Michael McCaul (R-Texas)
Committee on Homeland Security**

“A False Narrative Endangers the Homeland”

Today, the President’s rhetoric on the threat of al Qaeda and its franchises are in stark contrast to the reality we are witnessing in the Middle East and Northern Africa. Whether or not the downplaying of the spread of these Islamist extremist groups and the real threat they pose, which are metastasizing from the civil war in Syria, is to further a political agenda or to simply to avoid the conflict altogether, I believe this false narrative greatly endangers our national security.

Protecting this nation requires that we correctly identify the threats against it. It also requires that the United States lead on the world stage. I am increasingly concerned that we are doing very little of both.

The Administration has labeled the Fort Hood massacre, in my home state, “work place violence,” explained Benghazi away with a protest to a video as opposed to an al Qaeda-driven attack, and removed words like “violent Islamist extremism” from their vernacular. With each attack, the Administration appears to distance itself from who’s behind it.

President Obama repeatedly tells us that: “al-Qaeda is on its heels” and “on the run.” In May of last year, the President said that: “Osama bin Laden is dead, and so are most his top lieutenants. There have been no large-scale attacks on the United States, and our homeland is more secure.” Killing bin Laden was an important accomplishment, but it has not put al-Qaeda on its heels or secured the Homeland. In fact, Peter Bergen wrote in an article last week that: “al-Qaeda appears to control more territory in the Arab world than it has done at any time in its history.”

Foremost in the Narrative, is the Administration’s frequent use of the “core al-Qaeda” concept. This is a false construct in my judgement and misleading for a number of reasons. Today, there is no central al Qaeda nucleus. References to a “core al-Qaeda” imply that its defeat would dismantle terrorist efforts around the world and eliminate the terrorist threat to the Homeland. This is not the case.

Over time, the term “al-Qaeda” has come to symbolize an ideology of hate toward the West with a goal of establishment of a Caliphate, rule by Sharia Law and the pathway there through violent jihad.

We’re seeing it’s spread play out in the Middle East, in Africa, and in the Caucasus. Although many terrorist groups subscribe to this ideology, we must understand that they are independent organizations-planning and conducting operations without the oversight of an al-Qaeda central command. The only “core” is the ideology itself, and defeat of an ideology requires more than just drone strikes. The failure to recognize this truth prevents us from understanding the real threat from Islamic extremism and clouds our judgment in fighting against it. Ultimately, you cannot defeat an enemy you are unwilling to define.

The second part of the false narrative is our increasing willingness to abdicate our responsibility as a world leader. In the aftermath of World War II, President Truman said:

“The peoples of the earth face the future with grave uncertainty, composed almost equally of great hopes and great fears. In this time of doubt, they look to the United States as never before for good will, strength, and wise leadership.”

Again today, the people of the world face the future with grave uncertainty, and they still look to the United States for stable leadership.

We are witnessing a worldwide rebalancing, as we have before in modern history. This time, however, it is exacerbated by a Sunni-Shia sectarian conflict that has consumed the Middle East, causing great unrest across the region, and is forcing countries around the world to intercede. Yet our steadfast leadership is notably absent.

Terrorist groups are multiplying. They are spreading like wildfire across Northern Africa. Foreign fighters are pouring into Syria at an alarming rate, while Syria itself is being pulled apart by Saudi Arabia and Iran. Red lines are drawn and crossed, diminishing our world standing and forcing other countries to act where we have failed. Our negotiations with Iran damaged our relationship with Saudi Arabia and Israel. American forces pulled out of Iraq and al-Qaeda has taken over Fallujah - once the symbol of the United States’ commitment to stability in Iraq. We are pulling out of Afghanistan, where not so long ago the 9/11 masterminds plotted against the United States. In Egypt we have been indecisive with our support, while radical elements are growing. Our lack of leadership has damaged our standing in the world, and created a power vacuum being filled by terrorists who are prospering in our absence.

President Kennedy told us that: “our strength as well as our convictions have imposed upon this nation the role of leader in freedom’s cause.” I believe that statement is as true today as it was then. It is through our stable leadership and clearly identifying our enemies that we will secure the Homeland and protect the American people.

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