



Committee on
HOMELAND SECURITY
Chairman Michael McCaul

Opening Statement

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**Statement of Subcommittee Chairman Peter King (R-NY)
Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence
Committee on Homeland Security**

“Threat to the Homeland from Egypt and the Sinai Peninsula”

Remarks as Prepared

“The ability for al Qaeda to train, plot, recruit, and communicate is dependent on their access to safe havens. Al Qaeda takes advantage of instability and ungoverned space, the availability of which has significantly increased in the last three years since the Arab Spring.

This instability has provided the opportunity for terrorist networks – many with ties to al Qaeda – to operate freely in the ungoverned spaces.

- In Syria, the al Nusra Front has grown in strength and is attracting a large number of foreign fighters to battle the Assad regime and to expand their global attack plotting.
- In Iraq, areas which were hard-won by coalition forces, have been again overrun by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), also known as al Qaeda in Iraq.
- In Libya, branches of Ansar al Sharia took part in an assault on US diplomatic facilities and personnel that left 4 Americans dead.
- Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), operating in Yemen, carried out the 2009 Christmas Day underwear plot and the 2010 printer cartridge plot. Intelligence officials regularly report that AQAP remains the most significant terrorist threat to the U.S.
- Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb operates throughout Algeria and Mali and took more than 800 hostages in an attack on the In Amenas gas facility.
- Boko Haram, a newly designated Foreign Terrorist Organization, has likely benefited from AQIM assistance and has slaughtered thousands in Nigeria.
- In Somalia, the al Qaeda affiliate al Shabaab has carried out numerous attacks and is likely linked to the West Gate Mall attack in Kenya.
- Despite U.S. counterterrorism successes in Afghanistan diminishing the foothold and control of al Qaeda core, senior leaders are still present and waiting for the U.S. withdrawal of forces this year.

Today’s hearing is focused on the dangerous surge of terrorist activity in Egypt. There has been significant reporting over the last few years about jihadist networks taking hold in the eastern Sinai Peninsula. These groups have launched attacks against the Egyptian military, Israel, civilian shipping in the Suez Canal, and other targets.

As is often the case with such “safe havens,” there are many gaps in our understanding of these groups. Their size, their relationship to one another, and their operational capability, are not clear.

However, in the last month alone, terrorists have assassinated a senior Egyptian official, bombed the Cairo police headquarters, shot down a military helicopter, and fired rockets into Israel. The speed with which these groups have gathered strength and conducted sophisticated operations not only in the Sinai, but in central Cairo is noteworthy.

The apparent sophistication of these groups and indications they are linked to al Qaeda, raise serious counterterrorism issues and emerging homeland security concerns.

Egypt's role in the formation and history of al Qaeda has made it a target for many years.

- An Egyptian, Ayman al Zawahiri, has led al Qaeda since the death of Osama Bin Laden and the ideology that inspired al Qaeda was developed in Egypt.
- His brother, Mohammed, was arrested outside of Cairo in August 2013 under speculation he was working with jihadist networks in the Sinai.
- Just last year, the Egyptian Muhammad Jamal Network (MJN) was designated a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) by the Department of State for ties to al Qaeda and for using "the AQAP network to smuggle fighters into training camps..."

However, what is perhaps most important is that these groups seem to be aligned with al Qaeda's global jihad.

In his recent open testimony before the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, when asked whether al Qaeda affiliates in Syria presented a threat outside of Syria, the Director of the CIA acknowledged that "any group that has its origins in Al Qaida, or are still associated with Al Qaida, presents a threat."

If this is true, working with the Egyptian government to effectively fight jihadist networks in the Sinai should be a primary objective in our relationship with Cairo.

Unfortunately, the Administration's decision to cut military aid in September has only hampered this effort and displays a dangerous indifference to our shared interest with Egypt: defeating jihadist networks operating in the Sinai and throughout the country.

These groups threaten innocent Egyptians, American interests, and our ally Israel.

Given what we have witnessed with the growth of AQAP, which prior to 2009 the U.S. did not consider that it posed a threat to the U.S. Homeland, we have to monitor al Qaeda elements in the Sinai for emerging threats to the Homeland.

Furthermore, the instability caused by Egyptian revolution has provided a period of time in which large groups of people moved into, out of, and around the country with less stringent oversight. Even still, the movement of persons, weapons, and other illicit goods across Egypt's border with Libya and Sudan continues unabated.

For these, and for other reasons, the potential exists that al Qaeda-linked extremists could take advantage of a permissive operating environment to plan attacks against the United States.

This has heightened the need for the U.S. to work with the Egyptian and Israeli governments on defeating and disrupting jihadist networks. Perhaps more than ever before, ensuring Egypt can fight al Qaeda is in the best interest of the United States.

As Chairman of the Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence of the Committee on Homeland Security, I feel it is necessary to begin a discussion on this emerging threat. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on who these groups are, what they're capable of, and how to work with our partners to defeat them."

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