



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 Global Battleground: The Fight Against Islamist Extremism at Home and Abroad”

Remarks as Delivered

Before 9/11, we failed to recognize the threat when it was right before our eyes. This failure brought us into war with violent Islamist extremism—the perversion of a religion into a deeply insidious worldview. Any attempt to deny the ideological underpinnings of the threat endangers our security.

Throughout history, we have seen power vacuums filled by violent groups, deranged dictators, and extremist ideologies. Nowhere is this more evident than with the rise of Islamist terror groups, which have spread like wildfire on this president’s watch because of two glaring leadership failures.

The first failure was the president’s decision to spin a false narrative. The White House proclaimed our fight was against “core” al Qaeda and that the group was “on the path to defeat.” In reality, the jihadist threat had metastasized. The president refused to characterize the Ft. Hood and Boston Marathon attacks for what they were—acts of brutal Islamist terrorism.

The second leadership failure was the president’s decision to dismantle America’s counterterrorism policies and return to a pre-9/11 law-enforcement posture. The president tried to close Guantanamo Bay and release hardened terrorists; sought to give terrorists the same legal protections as U.S. citizens; negotiated and swapped hostages with terrorists; and failed to prevent the rise of ISIS and the emergence of al Qaeda sanctuaries.

A year after the president called ISIS the “JV team,” the organization can draw on over 20,000 foreign fighters and has been linked to 29 terrorist plots or attacks targeting the West. And the day the president said the global war on terror was effectively over was the day al Baghdadi created ISIS. ISIS now controls territory the size of Belgium, governs millions of people, draws on billions of dollars in revenue, and commands tens of thousands of foot soldiers.

Terrorist safe havens have spread across the Middle East and North Africa. Last week, ISIS claimed responsibility for the terror attack in a museum in Tunisia; the gunmen involved had received training in Libyan terror camps. ISIS also claimed responsibility for the horrific attacks on mosques in Yemen which killed more than 150 people. Yemen's instability has led to the evacuation of our remaining forces and will further empower extremists. This situation is alarming given that al Qaeda's premier bomb-makers in AQAP have been targeting the homeland and Western interests for years.

Over the past year, Islamist terrorists have struck Western cities, including Paris, Sydney, Ottawa, Copenhagen, and Brussels. We have witnessed the reach of extremists here at home as well. An Ohio-based ISIS sympathizer was arrested in January for plotting to attack the U.S. Capitol. Last week, an ISIS-aligned hacking group posted the names, photos, and addresses of 100 American service members, calling their "brothers residing in America" to attack these individuals.

At the other end of the Islamist extremist spectrum, we face Iran, the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism responsible for killing Americans for more than three decades. In 2011, it attempted to assassinate the Saudi Arabian ambassador in what would have been a mass-casualty attack here in Washington.

The Iranian regime is on the march, destabilizing the Middle East and stoking sectarian conflict. Yet this administration has given up on rolling back Iran's nuclear threat and it continually fails to recognize the regime as part of the radical Islamist threat. As Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu said before Congress, "Iran and ISIS are competing for the crown of militant Islam."

We continue to face "dual threats" here at home: foreign fighters and homegrown terrorism. More than 180 Americans have tried or succeeded in joining extremists in Syria and Iraq along with 3,000-5,000 other Westerners with visa-free access to the United States. Armed with military training and terrorist connections, these individuals are only a plane flight away.

Islamist radicals are also tailoring their hateful ideology toward Western audiences on social media and recruiting homegrown fanatics. The easy transmission of extremist propaganda on the internet has elevated the threat to the homeland. For example, there have been at least 97 homegrown terror plots or attacks in the United States since 9/11—and more than three-fourths of them have taken place in the past five years.

The rise of radicalism we are witnessing today is not just a passing phenomenon. The War against Islamist Terror will be the great struggle our lifetime, the great struggle of this century, and I believe we have a moral and strategic obligation to fight it with all tools at our disposal. Just as communism and fascism before it, Islamist extremism is a cancer that must be destroyed.

To blunt their progress, we can begin by coalescing around a comprehensive strategy to wipe out these jihadists and their twisted ideology. Our purpose should be clear: It must be the policy of the United States to confront and defeat Islamist terror groups wherever they are and prevent their reemergence in order to ensure the long-term security of the United States and our allies.

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