



Committee on  
**HOMELAND SECURITY**  
Chairman Michael McCaul

*Opening Statement*

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**Statement of Subcommittee Chairman Peter T. King (R-NY)**

**Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence  
Committee on Homeland Security**

**“Assessing the Threat to the Homeland from al Qaeda Operations in Iran and Syria”**

**Remarks as Prepared**

I welcome our distinguished witnesses for a hearing on the important issue of Assessing the Threat to the Homeland from al Qaeda Operations in Iran and Syria.

This hearing continues the Counterterrorism and Intelligence Subcommittee’s plan for the 113th Congress: to examine current threats, detect emerging threats, and oversee intelligence sharing between federal, State and local governments.

Today we’ll examine safe havens in Syria and Iran from which al Qaeda targets the Homeland, the relationship between al Qaeda and Iran, the threat to the U.S. from foreign jihadis in Syria, and how Syrian instability may impact al Qaeda’s capabilities.

On April 22nd Canadian Mounties arrested two Islamists, Raed Jaser and Chiheb Esseghaier. At the direction of al Qaeda members in Iran, these men planned to derail a passenger train from Toronto, as it passed over Niagara Falls en route to New York City.

On May 9th American authorities arrested Ahmed Abassi, an associate of these men in the U.S., who also supported al-Qaeda’s Syrian affiliate.

Had their terror plot succeeded, American and Canadian civilian casualties in New York could have been catastrophic.

Let me say up front that the Committee on Homeland Security was never briefed, even in classified settings, about this year-long investigation of a serious threat against the Homeland.

New York's State and local police were not briefed about this plot, either.

We've seen this pattern for four years now, most recently in the Boston Marathon bombing and the planned follow-up attack on Times Square, and in the Fort Hood and Little Rock shootings.

The Federal government identifies potential terrorists or attack plans, but does not share the knowledge with State and local cops.

Twelve years after 9/11, the Federal government must still do a better job of sharing counterterrorism intelligence with cops who can prevent such attacks, and firemen who will respond to any attack.

Such information sharing was urged by the 9/11 Commission and ordered by the Homeland Security and Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Acts.

There is much we don't know about the relationship between Iran and al Qaeda. It is, as Winston Churchill described the fraught relationship of Hitler's Nazi Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union in 1939, "a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma."

The Iranian regime is a state sponsor of terror, and al Qaeda is of course a terror organization. But Tehran's ayatollahs are Shi'a Muslims, while al Qaeda are Sunni Muslims.

For this reason Iran and al Qaeda are enemies under some circumstances. In Syria, Tehran's proxies, the Assad regime and the terror group Hezbollah, fight against the Syrian opposition, which has a substantial al Qaeda influence and presence. Iranian terror proxies and al Qaeda also fight each other in Iraq.

On the other hand, since 2001 some senior leaders on al Qaeda's management council have resided in Iran. Al Qaeda uses Iran as facilitation, finance and transportation hub.

From this sanctuary al Qaeda ordered attacks against Westerners in Saudi Arabia in 2003. But our Government's assumption was that Iran would not allow al Qaeda to plot against America from within Iran.

This latest al-Qaeda plot against New York, hatched from inside Iran, makes us question this assumption. A similar reassessment of Iranian intentions was caused by Iran's 2011 plot to

partner with a Mexican drug cartel to assassinate a Saudi ambassador, by means of a car bomb here in Washington, DC.

Greatly adding to our concerns are the following facts. Al Qaeda in Syria, also known as the Nusra Front, is an outgrowth of al-Qaeda's vicious Iraqi affiliate. It is responsible for the vast majority of suicide attacks in Syria.

Among the several thousand members of the Nusra Front are, according to unclassified sources, a large number of foreign jihadis with Belgian, British, Danish, Dutch, German, Finnish, French or Swedish citizenship or residency.

Europeans constitute as much as 10 percent of this al-Qaeda affiliate's strength.

Canadians, Australians and perhaps even Americans have gone to Syria to fight alongside -- or even with -- al Qaeda.

These foreign fighters will likely undergo further Islamist radicalization, as they receive terror training and gain combat experience, before returning home to the West.

The border between Syria and Turkey, a Muslim Brotherhood-led country which is itself a cause of growing terror concerns, is porous. It will be difficult for U.S. authorities to determine, going forward, whether a European or British Commonwealth citizen, or a returning U.S. person, may have been inside Syria.

The Syrian situation is made more dangerous by the availability -- and even use -- of military-grade chemical weapons.

If even a fraction of Syria's vast stockpile of poisonous and toxic gases falls into the hands of terror groups, these weapons of mass destruction will pose a grave threat to our Homeland security.

I would like to thank our distinguished panel of witnesses in advance and now recognize the Ranking Member for his opening statement.

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