



Committee on
HOMELAND SECURITY
Chairman Michael McCaul

Opening Statement

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

“The Rising Terrorist Threat and the Unfulfilled 9/11 Recommendation”

Remarks as Prepared

Ten years after the 9/11 Commission provided recommendations to prevent other terrorist attacks on United States soil the terror threat from abroad remains real, and we will continue to be challenged in identifying home grown terrorists. The current instability in the Middle East, the web of al Qaeda affiliates and the rapid advance of extremist ISIS militants are fueling the rise of new safe havens where terrorists live, train and plot future attacks.

In a recently released anniversary report, the former members of the Commission reflect on the progress made and provide recommendations on how to further enhance the security of the United States. Specifically, the new report concludes that some recommendations from the Commission remain unfulfilled and one in particular has been largely ignored— reforming Congressional jurisdiction over the Department of Homeland Security.

In 2004, the 9/11 Commission recognized the importance of eliminating terrorist safe havens. The report stated: “Terrorists should no longer find safe haven where their organizations can grow and flourish... Our efforts should be accompanied by a preventative strategy that is as much, or more, political as it is military.” Those words were written a decade ago—yet safe havens for terrorists not only still exist, they have expanded well beyond the regions where the 9/11 attacks originated.

For instance, ISIS - an organization too extreme for al Qaeda - has made alarming territorial gains in both Syria and Iraq, establishing the largest terrorist safe haven since 9/11. The group’s leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, has declared himself head of a new Muslim caliphate. ISIS has the ambition and now the funding, weapons and manpower to launch attacks against U.S. interests abroad and possibly the homeland.

Furthermore, foreign fighters with valid travel documents are flooding into the region; many from Western countries including the United States. Like ISIS, Al-Nusra, the Syrian al-Qaeda affiliate, has established training camps catering not only to local extremists but fighters coming from abroad. These camps served as training grounds for many including the American teenager from Florida who is believed to have carried out a suicide bomb attack in May. Although he carried out his attack in Syria, Abusahla could have instead attempted to travel back to the United States following his training.

Self-radicalized terrorists like Nidal Hassan, who fatally shot thirteen people at Fort Hood in 2009, and Tamerlan Tsarnaev, one of the perpetrators of the Boston Marathon bombings, were allegedly influenced or used such extremist propaganda, rich with content from jihadi fighting.

The threats to the homeland extend beyond the traditional battlefield into the cyber-realm. American companies, universities, defense capabilities and critical infrastructure are all under cyber attack. Most concerning, however, is that the threat is outpacing our readiness to combat it. One expert described our cyber-preparedness as being at “September 10th levels.” My concern is that history will repeat itself when it comes to cyber and we will not, as a nation, acknowledge the gravity of the threat until it is too late.

Another unfulfilled Commission recommendation also threatens American security. The continued fragmentation of Congressional oversight of the Department of Homeland Security makes us less agile in the face of these growing threats. DHS is forced to expend scarce resources reporting to far too many Congressional Committees—resources that could be spent protecting the American people.

Ironically, this excess of oversight actually leads to a lack of accountability because of the mixed signals and conflicting demands of Congressional Committees. In fiscal year 2013, according to the Department of Homeland Security, the agency facilitated more than 1,650 briefings with Members of Congress or their staff, provided 161 witnesses who testified at 105 hearings, and engaged with nearly all Members of Congress and dozens of Committees. This cost taxpayers tens of millions of dollars and cost DHS 66 work years in man-hours.

To address these flaws, 9/11 Commission Report recommended that Congress “create a single, principal point of oversight and review for homeland security.” This critical step has yet to be taken and is cited in the Commission’s latest report.

Just as the National Security Act of 1947 reorganized the United States Government’s military and intelligence agencies into a unified Federal structure, the Homeland Security Act of 2002 unified several agencies into a single organization to coordinate and unify national homeland security efforts. While these changes were accepted by the Administration, Congress, in many cases is still working under pre-9/11 authorities.

Congress needs to create clear jurisdictional lines to ensure that DHS receives strong, centralized oversight and can focus its efforts on its mission to protect the United States. These steps are necessary to ensure the safety and security of the homeland.

In the meantime, my Committee will spend significant time the remainder of this year and into the next Congress authorizing key DHS components. Moreover in partnership with the other Committees of jurisdiction, I intend to lead the first ever DHS authorization through regular order.

We are fortunate today to have the co-chair of the 9/11 Commission Tom Kean, as well as former Commissioner Jamie Gorelick here to offer their insights and perspectives. I hope our hearing today will help us create actionable solutions that can address these shortcomings sooner rather than later.

I would like to take this opportunity to recognize the 9/11 victims' families who are with us today. Through their persistent efforts, the 9/11 Commission was established to investigate that horrific attack on U.S. soil. We thank them for their continued commitment to secure the homeland.

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