



Committee on  
**HOMELAND SECURITY**  
Chairman Michael McCaul

*Opening Statement*

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

**“World Wide Threats to the Homeland”**

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Secretary Johnson, Director Comey, and Director Olsen—we’ve asked you to come before the Committee today to discuss the array of threats facing the U.S. homeland and the government’s response.

A chief concern of ours is the proliferation of terrorist safe havens around the world. The 9/11 Commission’s number one recommendation was to use “all elements of national power” to deny sanctuary to terrorist groups, yet we have seen safe havens spread with alarming speed in recent years. Such territory makes it far easier for terrorist groups to train recruits and hatch plots against the West.

During this Administration, no less than three extremist sanctuaries have emerged or expanded—in Syria, Iraq, and Libya. In Afghanistan, if the Administration goes forward with its plan to withdraw our troops like they did in Iraq, we might see terrorists reclaiming the territory from which they planned 9/11.

Our obvious and most immediate concern is the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or ISIS. I agree with the President that this group does not represent a legitimate “state” but is rather a cabal of butchers peddling a violent and perverted brand of Islam. However, it should never have taken the beheading of two Americans for our government to wake up the American people to this menace. We have known for many months that ISIS was surging and represented the top threat to the United States. But the White House dithered without taking action, and the President played down the danger.

Despite recent U.S. strikes against the group, ISIS still holds onto thousands of square miles of territory where they are able to operate their terrorist army. Recent estimates indicate that they may have up to 30,000 fighters, of which 2,000 or so are Americans and Europeans. These radicalized Westerners represent an exceptionally grave threat to the U.S. homeland because of their militant training, extremist connections, ease of travel, and intimate knowledge of the West.

Today, we expect to hear about the Administration’s strategy to deter, detect, and disrupt the return of these foreign fighters to U.S. territory and that of our allies.

Let us be clear: our Nation is at war with this group and the twisted ideology it is seeking to spread. We must consider all instruments of national power to rollback and defeat these fanatics now and destroy them wherever they emerge. Or, if we don’t take the fight to the enemy overseas, we risk having to fight them here at home.

Our military efforts must include airstrikes in Syria to cut off the head of the snake. Top military advisors to the President, including the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs General Martin Dempsey, have said that to defeat ISIS its safe haven in Syria must be destroyed. I agree with him, and I hope the President is taking the advice of his top commanders and Generals.

But ISIS is not the only threat we face. I hope we hear today how your agencies are working to address the wider danger from Violent Islamist Extremism here at home and abroad.

The White House has presented a false narrative in recent years about this threat, claiming for instance that al Qaeda was “on its heels,” “on the path to defeat,” and had been “decimated.” While, in reality, the al Qaeda network has grown and materialized into a deadly global franchise, with a spider web of affiliates and ideologically similar groups attempting to fill the power vacuums across the Middle East, Africa, and South East Asia.

The ideological struggle against Violent Islamist Extremism is taking place not just overseas, but also here at home. There have been more than 70 homegrown violent jihadist plots or attacks in the United States since 9/11, according to the Congressional Research Service. More than two-thirds of them have been uncovered or have taken place in only the past five years. Many of the suspects were radicalized at least in part by online Islamist propaganda, including the Boston Marathon bombers and the Fort Hood attackers, a tool ISIS excels at utilizing.

Additionally, last night federal authorities indicted a U.S. citizen from Rochester, NY for raising money, recruiting and facilitating travel for ISIS.

While the United States continues to battle “physical threats” posed by terrorist organizations, we must also be vigilant in protecting the homeland against asymmetric threats like cyber attacks from state and non-state actors. President Obama recently noted that the “cyber threat is one of the most serious economic and national security challenges we face as a nation.” Sadly, many experts believe the nation is woefully underprepared to protect itself in this domain. In a recent report from the Bipartisan Policy Center, former 9/11 Commissioners described the U.S. cyber preparedness as being at pre-September 11th levels.

Last month, Defense Secretary Hagel said “The world is exploding all over.” I agree with his assessment and we look forward to your testimony today surveying the threat landscape, and elaborating on how we are countering those set against us and our interests.

Before I turn it over to Ranking Member Thompson, I would note this is the first time the FBI Director has appeared before this Committee, and we very much appreciate your presence. Additionally, this is likely one of the last Congressional appearances for NCTC Director Matt Olsen who has announced his retirement. We thank you for your service, Director Olsen, and appreciate you being here. It has been a true honor to work with you. Secretary Johnson, you’ve been on the job at DHS for nine months. I appreciate our good working relationship and look forward to having you appear before the Committee for some time to come.

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