



Committee on  
**HOMELAND SECURITY**  
Chairman Michael McCaul

The Heritage Foundation  
Remarks as Prepared  
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**The Honorable Michael McCaul**

**“Terror Gone Viral: The Rise of Radicalism and America’s Response”**

I’d like to thank Jim Carafano for the kind introduction and for his leadership on national security issues, and I am grateful to the Heritage Foundation for welcoming me to speak here today. Jim, you and David continue to be a tremendous resource for the Committee, Congress, and the country, and I am grateful for that.

I regret that I will be unable to stay for the panel that follows my remarks, but I am pleased to see it will include Attorney General Meese and Ken Rapuano, two men who have served our Nation with distinction and know the challenges of protecting it in the face of external threats.

Last week terror struck in the American heartland. This was the type of event we have been most worried about lately: a radicalized suspect—not on our radar—launching an assault here on U.S. soil. This individual was inspired by a hateful ideology, and he attacked soldiers who risk their lives to protect us in the name of freedom.

Our hearts go out to the families and friends of those who were killed in Chattanooga.

While our consolations cannot outweigh their loss, we can honor the memory of the victims by confronting the root of the violence we saw last week and refusing to allow complacency to follow in the wake of terror.

That is why I am here today. Radicalism is on the rise, and war is being brought to our doorsteps. If it happened in Chattanooga, it could happen anywhere, anytime.



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I agree with British Prime Minister David Cameron who said this week that we face the “struggle of our generation.” A deceitful and perverted brand of Islam is expanding globally and at great cost to the free world. And we need to act decisively to defeat it.

First, I will talk this morning about how this new age of terror has altered the security landscape on the home front and spread rapidly through our communities.

Then I will address the second front in our struggle with extremists—overseas—and how important it is for us to take the fight to the enemy and challenge its ideological core.

But first, I am disappointed to announce that I believe we are losing on both fronts in the war against Islamist terror.

Our enemies have the momentum, and they have thrown us off-balance. The numbers don’t lie. Last year was the deadliest year on record for global terrorism, with attacks rising by 35 percent over the previous year and terror deaths worldwide nearly doubling.

The motive power behind the terror surge is the rise of ISIS and its affiliates—as well as al Qaeda’s persistence. And by any measure, we have failed to turn the tide against them. Their global recruitment has soared, their territory has been held or expanded, and the number of plots against us has spiked.

The pace is so staggering that I directed my Committee staff to begin issuing a monthly “Terror Threat Snapshot” cataloging the rapid rise in extremist activity.

Since the President declared ISIS to be the “JV team” of terror early last year, the group has inspired or directed more than 50 terrorist plots against the West. ISIS also went from a single terrorist sanctuary to having a direct presence or affiliates in 18 countries.



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The group's rapid rise has inspired more than 25,000 citizens from at least 100 countries to flock to Syria as foreign fighters, a figure that has tripled since last July. And officials now estimate more than 250 Americans have sought to join or succeeded in joining extremists in Syria.

Terrorist groups have succeeded in spreading their influence because they have evolved. Gone are the days of bin Laden, when extremists plotted through couriers and caves. We are seeing a new generation radicalize and recruit online and across borders.

Americans are especially concerned that we are losing on the home front, where groups like ISIS have started to permeate our society with terrifying speed.

There are people right here in our country intent on striking from within, captivated by an evil and twisted ideology that drives vulnerable minds into unconscionable acts of violence and hate.

We have seen more than a dozen ISIS-linked terror plots in the United States, including recently thwarted plans to set off pipe bombs on Capitol Hill, behead law enforcement officers, conduct mass shootings, detonate bombs at New York City landmarks, and live-stream a murderous rampage at a college campus.

We even disrupted terrorist plotting to attack July 4<sup>th</sup> celebrations in the United States. In fact, more than 60 ISIS supporters have been arrested or indicted in the United States in the past year. That's more than one a week. And now the FBI director says he has open ISIS investigations in all 50 states.

The majority have never set foot in a far-away safe haven and were recruited by ISIS online or distributed the group's social media propaganda. And with over 200,000 ISIS tweets per day, the chatter is so high and the volume is so loud that it is difficult to get a handle on all of it.

This isn't terror as usual. This is terror gone viral.



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I commend the FBI, Homeland Security, and State and local law enforcement for disrupting so many of these plots. But as we saw in Chattanooga, we will not be able to stop them all.

In this age of peer-to-peer terrorism, authorities are searching for suspects who use secure apps to communicate and crowd-source their calls for attack, inspiring operatives who never have to cross borders to carry out terror. ISIS cyber commanders now regularly send out internet missives to their followers, and as we saw in Garland, Texas sometimes our first indication of a hatched plot is an internet hashtag.

We need have a frank conversation in America about the challenges posed by violent extremists using social media and "dark space" to further their violent plots. Extremists have migrated away from telephones and onto new platforms, but our laws and policies have not kept pace, making it more difficult to uncover terrorist plans.

I don't claim to have the answer, but what I do know is that we all share some common ground. From Silicon Valley to the halls of Congress, we want to see terrorists brought to justice. This has to be the starting point in an urgent dialogue between the tech sector and policymakers to find solutions for the lawful monitoring of violent extremists and the protection of civil liberties.

We also need to do more to stop the spread of fanaticism before it leads to violent plotting. We spend billions of dollars to detect and disrupt terror attacks, but we have dedicated few resources toward combating the radicalization at the root of terror. This is the crucial "prevention" aspect of counterterrorism.

Sadly, while extremist recruiters are moving at broadband speed, we are moving at bureaucratic speed. The Administration has not appointed a lead agency in charge of combating domestic radicalization, and few resources or personnel are even allocated to it.



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When asked by our Committee, the top departments and agencies could only identify around \$15 million being spent and around two-dozen people working full-time on the issue. That's it. That means we've arrested twice as many ISIS recruits in the United States this year than there are full-time officials working to prevent ISIS from radicalizing Americans in the first place. In a high-threat environment, this is unacceptable.

Every day we wait, we cede more ground to our adversaries. As Chairman of the House Committee on Homeland Security, I will not stand on the sidelines—asking for more reports and studies—while terrorists plot inside our communities, murder our people, and seek to divide our nation.

Last week my Committee decided to push forward with a bill to streamline and raise the priority of the Department of Homeland Security's efforts to combat the viral spread of violent extremism.

For instance, our bill would give DHS the tools to combat ISIS and al Qaeda propaganda here at home through counter-narratives that show Islamist terror for what it really is. It would also help DHS empower local communities to spot signs of violent radicalization and help them develop “off-ramps” to discourage individuals from being lured overseas to fight with terror groups or from being convinced to commit acts of violence at home.

Ultimately though we must recognize the best homeland defense is a good offense. To win the war against Islamist terror, we have to take the fight to the enemy overseas.

I spent this past weekend in Tampa, Florida meeting with our leaders at U.S. Central Command and Special Operations Command. I am proud of the work they have done to dismantle terror groups and their focus on defeating ISIS. But the White House strategy under which they are operating is flawed. It only gives them the authorities to contain ISIS, rather than roll back and defeat it.



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We all know ISIS will replenish its ranks, plot more attacks, and expand globally until we have eliminated it at the source in Syria and Iraq. Yet right now we are fighting with one arm tied behind our back.

Under the current strategy, the rules of engagement are apparently too high to strike important targets, the number of military trainers is too low, our forces are being kept from fully assisting with the fight, and the President has taken options—like ground troops—off the table, telegraphing weakness to our enemies.

As a result, ISIS has been able to hold and extend key territory in Syria and Iraq despite our airstrikes, and the Iraqi government is beginning to rely on Shiite militias to fight back, a development which empowers Iran and could prolong the struggle by inflaming sectarian tensions.

I expressed this concern to Iraqi leaders several weeks ago when I was in Baghdad, but it is clear that without expanded American and regional assistance they are running out of options to win the fight. The bottom line is this: right now, I believe we are losing the war against ISIS and the wider war against Islamist terror.

The President's strategy has failed—and the evidence of failure mounts with every terror plot in America, every attack against our allies, and every emerging terrorist sanctuary used to radicalize and recruit foot soldiers willing to die in the name of a depraved ideology.

The time has come to overhaul our counter-ISIS strategy. And it is also time for the President to level with the American people about what will be needed to win the generation-long war with radical Islamists.

Today I want to lay out a basic framework for both, starting with the campaign against ISIS.

We must take immediate steps to strengthen our efforts, including: increasing the number of U.S. military trainers in Iraq and expanding partner participation;



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bolstering the air campaign through forward air controllers, close air support, and easing the rules of engagement; authorizing American military personnel to accompany and assist the Iraqis in combat, including ramping up the number of special operations forces; and accelerating the delivery of weapons to Kurdish Peshmerga forces and Sunni tribes.

But even with these improvements, more will be needed to win this campaign.

The President's "Iraq-first" strategy has left us without a credible ground force to fight ISIS in its main stronghold in Syria. Defense Secretary Carter announced this month that we have only trained 60 Syrian rebels to combat the group.

One reason we have so few recruits is we reportedly make them pledge not to fight the Assad regime, an absurd policy especially when their hometowns are being attacked by Assad. In short, we lack a serious ground force in Syria while ISIS itself boasts an estimated 30,000-man army.

Today I am calling upon the President to stand up a multinational coalition to build the force needed to clear the terrorist sanctuary in Syria. We need a combined air-and-ground campaign in Syria now, one composed of vetted opposition forces; Western trainers and advisors; special operations forces; and most importantly, regional military partners.

The coalition's immediate mandate should be to strengthen the opposition so that they can take the lead in taking back their country—not just from ISIS but all Sunni terror groups.

The coalition must also force Assad to step down. We cannot clear the Islamist terror safe haven in Syria anytime soon with the current regime in power. Assad's brutal oppression is one of the main drivers behind the rapid growth of ISIS in the first place. And he continues to decimate the moderate Syrian opposition that we badly need to fight extremists. With Assad out of the way, internationally-backed Syrian rebels stand a far better chance of rolling back terror groups, and our



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regional partners who want Assad gone would be far more willing to engage in the fight.

Before taking action, the coalition would first need to develop a post-Assad transition plan. Syria cannot go the way of Libya, which has fallen apart in the absence of security and a strong central government. As a result, coalition action in Syria must be paired with a viable plan to stabilize the country and prevent it from becoming a lawless vacuum. We must set up moderate, inclusive parties for success and sideline extremist factions eager to exploit the post-Assad chaos.

Our regional partners would play a central role on-the-ground in this coalition.

I have spoken to Syria's neighbors, including leaders in Turkey and Jordan, and other allies who are willing to put forward more resources. These countries cannot live with an extremist sanctuary next door and the spillover effects of terror, including refugee flows and suicide attacks. Some are prepared to help stabilize Syria and fight ISIS by committing their own ground troops, especially if it means the end of Assad. This is their backyard; so much of the burden for cleaning it up will fall on them.

But there is no substitute for American leadership, and right now there is no other nation capable of rallying a coalition to this cause.

I was pleased earlier this year to see Arab leaders propose the creation of a regional military force to tackle the spread of violent extremists, but such an organization is years away from reality. Regional partners are not ready to do this alone, and we cannot afford to wait for the President's piecemeal strategy to play out—a strategy he admits will take years to succeed. We need to take the lead in assembling this coalition of nations.

We also cannot forget the core principles needed to win the wider war against Islamist terror.



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The reach of ISIS and al Qaeda extends far beyond their primary territories. Yet the Administration's global counterterrorism approach can best be described as "whack-a-mole by drone." This may be low-cost, but it's also short-sighted.

Make no mistake: we have eliminated key terror leaders through targeted airstrikes, including the head of al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and, early this month, the leader of the Khorasan Group in Syria. But terror groups are getting better at quickly replacing fallen leaders.

We can chase fanatics to the gates of hell, but to win, we must destroy their sanctuaries and defeat their insidious ideology.

To do so, we need identify and confront threats early, wherever they emerge. In places like Libya and Yemen, we need to work urgently with regional partners to develop full-fledged stabilization plans before power vacuums turn into extremist hotspots.

And we must counter the ideology at the core of Islamist terror because, when left unchecked, we have seen it spread to all corners of the globe in the same way ideas like communism led to decades of destruction.

In the short-run, this means exposing the brutality and naked tyranny of life under the rule of Islamist terrorists so potential recruits will realize they are headed to a prison instead of a communal paradise.

But in the long-run, we need the President to outline a whole-of-government "grand strategy" for this fight.

The strategy should draw on all elements of American power to promote liberty and human dignity as the great alternatives to repression and terror.

History has shown that authoritarian systems are the wellspring of fanaticism. They silence dissent and cause violent ideologies to foment under the surface. Political and economic development are the only reliable, long-term antidotes to



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terror, which is why American foreign policy must be geared toward shaping a balance of power in the international system that favors the expansion of free states.

We have learned the hard way that leading from behind leads us into danger. Indeed, weakness invites aggression and leaves us to face more enemies in our city streets rather than on the battlefield overseas.

I do believe we are in for a generational struggle, but I have confidence that our country will prevail.

Every time we witness events like we saw in Chattanooga, Americans vow not to be intimidated or coerced by violence. And we send a clear message to fanatics: if you try to bring terror to our shores, we will bring justice to yours.

That is the resolve of the American people, and our resolve will propel us to eventual victory in the war against Islamist terror.

Thank you.