



Committee on
HOMELAND SECURITY
Chairman Michael McCaul

Opening Statement

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**Statement of Subcommittee Chairman Peter King (R-NY)
Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence**

“Terrorism in Africa: The Imminent Threat to the United States”

Remarks as Prepared

We are holding this hearing today to raise awareness and discuss threats related to the spread of Islamist terror ideology on the African continent. While this has been happening over the last decade, I believe that the U.S. is no closer to developing an appropriate counterterrorism strategy to address the threat which leaves the homeland and U.S. interests vulnerable.

There is no doubt that our nation has been behind the curve in terms of taking threats emanating from terror groups in Africa seriously. We have seen on too many occasions that al Qaeda-affiliated groups in Africa will attack American and Western interests when they see an opening; this was true in Libya, Algeria, Nigeria and Kenya. Documents recovered from bin Laden’s Abbottabad compound show how the dead terror leader was looking for operatives in Africa to carry out Western attacks. We saw this materialize on December 25, 2009 when Nigerian national Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab was directed by AQAP to carry out an attack on a US-bound plane.

Now we are seeing clear evidence of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) seeking to expand partnerships with Islamist terror groups in Africa. Boko Haram in Nigeria, Ansar Beit al Maqdis in Egypt (now known as the Islamic State’s Sinai Province), groups in Libya, and certain factions within AQIM have pledged allegiance to ISIS leadership. This does not lessen the threat these groups pose to the United States.

While it is imperative that the U.S. maintain, and increase, counterterrorism pressure in the Middle East and South Asia, we would be foolish to turn our backs on the imminent and growing threat posed by terror groups operating in Africa. The Administration has devoted comparatively little of its attention and resources to fighting this growing threat. Emboldened by the lack of consequences, Africa-based Islamist terrorist groups in recent months have perpetrated numerous acts of violence against innocent people.

During Easter in Kenya, al-Shabaab murdered hundreds of Christian students at a university. This was the same group of Islamist terrorists who slaughtered 67 men, women, and children at Nairobi's Westgate Mall in 2013. In February of this year, al-Shabaab—headquartered in Somalia—urged attacks on Western shopping malls, calling out the Mall of America in Minnesota by name.

In Nigeria one year ago, Boko Haram kidnapped 276 girls from a school and, it is widely believed by U.S. officials, sold them into slavery, prostitution, and forced marriages. The group is more than willing to target U.S. and international targets too. In August 2011, the group claimed responsibility for a car bomb outside the U.N. headquarters in Abuja killing more than 20 people. The State Department designated Boko Haram a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) in November 2013, well over two years after the group conducted its first attack against a Western interest. Earlier this month, the group publicly pledged allegiance to ISIS leadership and announced its new name as the Islamic State's West African Province.

In Mali and Algeria, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) aims to overthrow the government of Algeria and begin its own Islamic caliphate. It has spawned splinter groups whose goal is to "unite all Muslims from the Nile to the Atlantic in jihad against Westerners." The AQIM splinter group led by Mokhtar Belmokhtar carried out the January 2013 attack a gas facility near In Amenas, in southeastern Algeria. Over 800 people were taken hostage during the four-day siege, which led to the deaths of 39 civilians, including three U.S. citizens.

In Libya, ISIS may have control over three provinces and in November of last year reportedly took over the city of Derna—a Mediterranean coastal town just across from the Greek island of Crete, a popular tourist destination for Westerners, including Americans, and not terribly far from the coasts of Sicily and Israel. In February, ISIS released a video of the brutal execution of 21 Egyptian Christians kidnapped in Libya.

In addition, there are splinter groups and smaller sympathetic jihadist organizations in almost every North African nation. Africa is clearly a ripe recruiting ground for ISIS and al-Qaeda—one that both have shown they are all too happy to exploit.

Both ISIS and al-Qaeda are actively recruiting residents and citizens of Western nations—including the United States—to commit acts of jihad. We have become accustomed to hearing news of Americans or Brits arrested for joining or attempting to join ISIS—or planning attacks in their home country. The Intelligence Community—particularly the FBI—is to be commended for its proactive role in preventing these persons from achieving their violent aims. Yet the Administration has no overall strategy for dealing with this urgent threat at its source. I am concerned that as we improve our ability to prevent Americans and others from joining ISIS in Syria and Iraq, homegrown jihadist might seek training with affiliated groups in Africa.

As like-minded Islamist groups join forces and conquer new territory in Africa, it is time the leaders of the United States treat every source of terrorism as the sobering threat it is—whether that source is in Syria or Somalia, in Mosul or Mozambique, in Tikrit or Tunis.

We have therefore invited a distinguished panel of experts to share their expertise with us on the terrorist threat from Africa and what the political leaders of the United States must do to protect our citizens and prevent another terrorist attack in the United States.

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