

Ranking Member Brian Higgins (D-NY) - Opening Statement

“Understanding the Threat from Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula”

Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence

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According to the Director of National Intelligence, Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula is the greatest immediate threat from a terrorist group to the United States. Even though the group has not been successful in recent years at its plots to attack the United States, Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula's reach and ability to expose U.S. homeland security vulnerabilities makes it an extremely dangerous organization. The United States has attempted to make strides to diminish Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula's terror capabilities, but the threat from this organization remains.

In 2011, the United States, through a drone strike, killed Anwar Al lawki who was once considered the most dangerous man in the world. Without Al lawki, an English speaking American who recruited people to exploit Islam and perform terrorist acts, it was thought Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula's ability to strike the U.S. would be weakened. However, many in the intelligence community do not believe that Al lawki's death had a significant impact and National Counterterrorism Center Director Matthew Olsen has stated that Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula still has the ability to attack the United States with little or no warning. Aside from Al lawki, more than 35 senior leaders of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula have been killed by drone strikes, yet the organization still continues to be a threat to the United States.

Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula moves fast and recognizes targets and opportunities for recruitment and exposure. For example, in the wake of the Boston Marathon bombings, Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula dedicated an issue of its magazine, *Inspire*, to the Boston bombings. It praised the bombers and encouraged others to emulate the attack. Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula is also not afraid to attack the United States where it can, be it on United States soil or our interests abroad.

We saw this summer when the intelligence community intercepted a credible threat that Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula was planning on attacking United States facilities in Middle East and North Africa. This threat was taken very seriously and was considered imminent. The threat prompted the United States and European countries to close their embassies in the Middle East and North Africa for several days.

It is astonishing that even though the United States has eliminated much of their senior leadership and one of its most effective recruiters, the group can still have the capability to conduct attacks against the United States. It also recognizes the economic devastation terrorist acts can bring. A terrorist attack in the Buffalo-Niagara region, which has the busiest passenger border crossing with Canada and second busiest cargo crossing would be devastating. However, the Department of Homeland Security does not recognize the Buffalo-Niagara region as a high risk area. Hence, local law enforcement in the Buffalo-Niagara region are left without the resources that could possibly be needed if an attack from this dangerous organization were to occur.

As we saw with the Boston Marathon bombings, the role of first responders is invaluable to the response. With this terrorist group constantly adapting to and seemingly lying in wait for an exposure to our vulnerabilities, this nation should be prepared to prevent attacks in all areas and on all fronts.