

Ranking Member Kathleen Rice (D-NY) Opening Statement

Counterterrorism and Intelligence Subcommittee Hearing:

“The Persistent Threat: al Qaeda’s Evolution and Resilience”

July 13, 2017

As we gather to discuss the evolution and the current state of core al Qaeda and its affiliates, we know that there may be no clear cut end to the war on terror, and particularly the war on this particular group. At least no clear end that we can see today. But we also know that we have made real, significant progress in this fight the 16 years since 9/11. The U.S., together with our allies and partners around the world, have severely weakened al Qaeda’s leadership, and significantly reduced their power and operations here and abroad.

As a New Yorker, that means a great deal to me. And I want to say how incredibly grateful I am for all those who all those who worked so hard and sacrificed so much in this fight – first and foremost our fallen heroes, servicemembers, veterans and military families, but also our diplomats, and government officials, and policymakers – everyone who has come together and done their part to defeat an enemy that has taken so many innocent lives.

I think it’s important to recognize that under the Obama Administration, we saw the creation, evolution and implementation of effective counterterrorism policies that helped lead to the deaths of several key al Qaeda leaders, most notably Osama bin Laden, among others.

But there is no partisanship when it comes to fighting terrorism. And while many of the tangible successes against core al Qaeda came under President Obama, there’s no question that President George W. Bush’s administration helped to lay the ground work for that progress.

Days after the 9/11 attacks, President Bush reminded us that while our war on terror would begin with al Qaeda, it would not end until every terrorist group that seeks to do us harm was found and defeated. I think it’s fitting to remember that now – first, because we know that the threat from other terrorist groups has grown in recent years. But also because al Qaeda has not been defeated – they have not given up, that threat has not been eliminated.

So now, almost seven months into the Trump Administration, I believe it’s critically important for the new administration to craft and implement real strategies for countering the resurgence of al Qaeda, as well as ISIS and other groups that still pose a real and evolving threat to our homeland and to our allies and interests abroad.

We need a serious, comprehensive strategy across our entire government. Fiery rhetoric and tough talk is not a comprehensive strategy. Whether you agree with the policy itself or not, I think we can all agree that a travel ban on a few Muslim countries is not a comprehensive strategy – and could actually undermine our counterterrorism efforts by fueling propaganda campaigns.

What we need is a serious, focused, long-term counterterrorism strategy that builds on all that we’ve learned over the past 16 years, and guides us forward as we take on the evolving threats that we face right now and in the years ahead. I sincerely hope that people within the administration are working to create and implement such a strategy, I know that our Committee would welcome the opportunity to engage in that process, and I look forward to hearing any input our witnesses have on what some priorities and goals should be as we look to the future of our counterterrorism efforts.