



OPENING STATEMENT

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MEDIA CONTACTS

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**Statement of Chairman Michael T. McCaul (R-TX)
House Homeland Security Committee**

The Rise of Radicalism: Growing Terrorist Sanctuaries and the Threat to the U.S. Homeland

Remarks as Prepared

Before we begin, I would like to have a moment of silence in memory of those who lost their lives in the attacks in Paris and in honor of those who were wounded.

Today we must make this much clear: we are at war.

The world was reminded last week that Islamist terrorists are seeking to harm our people, destroy our way of life, and undermine the foundational principles of the free world.

The Paris attacks also confirmed our worst fears—that of the thousands of foreign fighters who have gone to Syria and Iraq to join ISIS, some would be deployed to bring terror back to the West. For more than a year, my Committee has warned of this growing threat.

We launched a bipartisan Congressional task force to focus on closing security gaps—both at home and abroad—to make it harder for terrorists and foreign fighters to slip across the border undetected.

More than 5,000 individuals with Western passports, including Americans, have gone to fight in Syria and Iraq. And some have already returned battle-hardened and prepared to strike.

After the Charlie Hebdo attacks, we traveled to Paris and met with counterterrorism officials on the ground who have known that Europe was wide-open to this danger. And we conducted site visits along the “jihadi superhighway,” from Western Europe to Turkey and then into the conflict zone.

Our findings were alarming.

This September, the Committee’s final task force report concluded that we are losing the struggle to stop Americans from going overseas to join jihadist groups, and it announced that gaping security weaknesses overseas are putting the U.S. homeland and our allies in danger.

Those worries have materialized.

We know that jihadists exploited these gaps to plot and execute the worst terrorist attack on French soil since World War II.

The world is now looking to America for leadership and for a clear-eyed understanding of the threat.

ISIS is not “contained,” as the President says. ISIS is expanding globally and is plotting aggressively.

In a matter of weeks it executed major external terrorist plots on three continents, destroying a Russian airliner, conducting suicide bombings in Lebanon, and launching a mass attack on the streets of Paris.

ISIS is now responsible for more than 60 terrorist plots against Western targets, including 18 in the United States. Here at home we have arrested more than one ISIS supporter a week, on average, in the past year, and the FBI says it has nearly 1,000 ISIS-related investigations in all 50 states.

If this is not a war, then I don’t know what is.

America cannot wait for terrorists to launch their next attack. The security of the free world depends on our response—and we must respond immediately.

We can start by securing the homeland.

Our task force report will not sit on a shelf. We are taking action to turn our recommendations into reality.

Soon we will release legislation designed to help close security loopholes and keep terrorists from reaching our shores.

We will also work to make sure terrorists do not infiltrate refugee flows to sneak into our country, as some apparently did to reach France.

Today we released a report laying out the preliminary findings of a nearly year-long investigation into counterterrorism challenges associated with Syrian refugee flows. The results of this review are sobering.

While we are proud of our humanitarian tradition of welcoming refugees into our country, this is a special case.

The President’s own intelligence and law enforcement officials have warned this Committee of the risks involved with the Syrian refugee program in this high-threat environment, and I have got to take them at their word.

I have called upon the President to temporarily suspend Syrian refugee admissions into the United States until we can improve the screening and vetting process. But we will not wait for the President to take action. Congress will act immediately to make sure the system is more secure.

Americans are worried about the terror threat level.

My promise to the American people is that we are working hard to strengthen this country's defenses. And my promise to our allies is that we stand ready to help you do the same.

But as we will discuss today, the rise of radicalism cannot be reversed without confronting the problem at the source: terrorist sanctuaries where jihadists recruit, train, and plot against us.

In Syria, we are witnessing the largest global convergence of jihadists in world history, yet the President's plan is to contain rather than rollback the threat. And what we have seen is that a policy of containment leads to a constant stream of terror.

We need a strategy for victory in the war against Islamist terror, and that strategy must begin in Syria.

Our enemies have said the latest attack is the beginning of "a storm." And our message back to them must be clear: you have fired the first shot in this struggle, but rest assured—America will fire the last.

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