



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

“Terrorism in North Africa: An Examination of the Threat”
March 29, 2017

Remarks as Prepared

During today’s hearing, we will focus on terror groups operating in and across North Africa, their intent to attack the U.S. and their capability to do so. While Iraq and Syria are the current epicenter of the Islamist extremism movement, that certainly has not always been the case nor will it be in the future.

The threat posed by ISIS and al-Qaeda are dynamic and are expected to increase as ISIS loses ground in Iraq and Syria and al-Qaeda seeks to reclaim its status as the leader of the global Jihadi movement.

In this context, North Africa, which sits on the edge of Europe, has emerged as an important theatre in the war on terror.

Al-Qaeda and ISIS elements are increasingly active – and competitive – and have both expanded their reach deep into the continent. Earlier this month, al-Qaeda factions in the Sahel reconciled their internal disputes and formed a single movement called “Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims,” pledging their loyalty to AQIM leader, Abdelmalik Droukdel. Additionally, the emergence of “ISIS in the Greater Sahara,” which was informally recognized by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in October 2016, confirmed the expansion of ISIS offshoots from Tunisia, Libya and the Sinai into the Sahel.

Terror groups continue to reap the benefits of the permissive environment created out of political instability and large swaths of ungoverned space. As of March 6, 2017, the State Department cautioned that terrorist groups, including AQIM and ISIS affiliates, are very active in North Africa, have demonstrated the capability to conduct attacks in the region, and the U.S. government remains “highly concerned about possible attacks against U.S. citizens, facilities and businesses.”

The Long War Journal reports that al-Qaeda affiliates launched over 250 attacks in the Maghreb and Sahel regions in 2016, a more than 150% increase from the reported 106 attacks in 2015.

Some argue that terror groups in this region are nationalist and do not pose a threat to the U.S. However, three months ago, the Pentagon confirmed that airstrikes on an ISIS stronghold in Libya were directed against, “external plotters, who were actively planning operations against our allies in Europe.”

Additionally, the return of thousands of battle-hardened foreign fighters from Iraq and Syria to their home countries in North Africa will likely elevate the threat level in the region.

My goals for today's hearing are to get a status update from experts on the activities of the various terror groups and the possible threat they may pose to the U.S. in the present and future. And to solicit your expert advice on what's working in our counterterrorism strategy and what more needs to be done as the Trump Administration is evaluating current efforts.

I want to thank you all for your work in this field and for appearing here today. I look forward to your testimony.

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