

**Opening Statement**  
**TNT/MENA Joint Subcommittee Hearing entitled:**  
**The Resurgence of al-Qaeda in Iraq**  
**Thursday, December 12, 2013**

As we know, so much has been going on with the resurgence of al-Qaeda in Iraq. Just last month, our Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa held a hearing on U.S. policy toward Iraq, as we tried to establish what the Administration's strategic goals and objectives are in Iraq. And the most common theme, and cause for concern, that came up throughout our hearing was the threat posed by the resurgence of al-Qaeda in Iraq.

Unfortunately, we have seen in many of our other hearings this year, al-Qaeda is resurgent throughout the Middle East and North Africa, not just in Iraq. The grim reality is that al-Qaeda is on the rise and continues to be a grave threat to U.S. national security – despite the Administration's assessment that it is on the run.

It has now been two years since we withdrew all U.S. forces from Iraq, leaving behind a fragile Iraq that perhaps was not ready to become stable. Since our departure, we have seen a drastic increase in sectarian violence at levels not seen since 2008 – with over 7,000 civilian deaths so far this year. Leaving Iraq with so much uncertainty caused irreparable repercussions to our regional and national security interests – not to mention all of the sacrifices made by our brave men and women in uniform.

The Administration's failure to find a mutually agreeable resolution to extend our presence in Iraq has severely weakened our influence in the country, and left a vacuum that is currently being filled by forces who seek to harm us and our allies.

On one side, we see a growing Iranian influence in Iraq, as the regime in Tehran strengthens its ties with the Maliki government. Nowhere is this more evident than with the unwillingness of the Iraqi government to halt the Iranians from using Iraqi airspace to ship Assad and his regime weapons, supplies and even Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps, IRGC, members to fight along Hezbollah and Assad's forces.

On the other hand, we have seen a dangerous rise in extremism as we witness a clear resurgence of al-Qaeda in Iraq, AQI, – also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham, ISIS, – and other groups, due to the fact that the Iraqi security forces are struggling to combat these extremists and their government is not willing to be tough on the Iranian regime.

AQI took advantage of the uncertain security situation created by U.S. disengagement in Iraq, and re-emerged stronger and more popular than before the surge. Viewed as a theater of jihad, Iraq, along with Syria, has been among one of the top destinations for foreign fighters who seek to engage in jihad. These foreign fighters pose a serious threat to our national security, that of our regional allies, and beyond, and may soon be able to create a large safe haven that spans from Syria to Iraq due to the instability and lack of security in both countries.

Not only do these fighters threaten our European partners – where many of these foreign fighters come to train, to wage jihad and then take what they learn back to their home countries – they also threaten our friends and allies in the region like Israel, Jordan and the UAE; who all fear that the extremists will soon turn their attention toward them.

It's important for the Administration to not lose sight on what is going on in Iraq and the region. Instead, it must strategically implement clear, constructive and goal-oriented policies that are geared toward advancing U.S. national interests in the long run.