



Statement

by

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U.S. Department of Homeland Security

Hearing on

“Worldwide Threats to the Homeland”

Before the

House Committee on Homeland Security

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Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Thompson, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear today to discuss the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) efforts to address worldwide threats to our homeland.

Before I begin, I would like to recognize my colleagues at the table: Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Director Jim Comey and National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) Director Matt Olsen. I have known both of these dedicated public servants for years. Twenty five years ago Director Comey and I were Assistant U.S. Attorneys together in the Southern District of New York, and Matt Olsen was the General Counsel of the NSA while I was the General Counsel of the Defense Department. These two public servants are steadfast partners to DHS and to me, and I consider it a privilege to work alongside them as we meet our shared mission of keeping our nation and the American people safe. And as Matt prepares to leave his post at NCTC, I want to congratulate him on his 24 years of distinguished service to this country. As President Obama has said, every American is safer because of his service.

As this Committee knows, the United States faces a constantly evolving threat environment. Thirteen years after the 9/11 attacks, threats to our nation have not subsided.

The job of DHS and its more than 240,000 men and women is to remain vigilant against these threats, regardless of where they originate or what form they take. First and foremost, that means detecting and preventing terrorist threats that may seek to penetrate the homeland from land, sea, or air. As I have noted before, DHS must always be agile and vigilant in continually adapting to evolving threats, be it a foreign fighter or a "lone wolf" terrorist living within our midst.

Counterterrorism is the cornerstone of the DHS mission. And thirteen years after 9/11, it's still a dangerous world. There's still a terrorist threat to our homeland.

Today the terrorist threat is different from what it was in 2001. It is more decentralized and more complex. Not only is there core al Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan, there is al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula – which is still active in its efforts to attack the homeland – al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, al Shabaab in Somalia, the al Nusrah Front in Syria, and the newest affiliate, al Qaeda in the Indian subcontinent. There are groups like Boko Haram in Nigeria, which are not official affiliates of al Qaeda, but share its extremist ideology.

The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, or ISIL, previously known as al Qaeda in Iraq, is now vying to be the preeminent terrorist organization on the world's stage. At present, we have no credible information that ISIL is planning to attack the homeland of the United States.

But that is not, by any means, the end of the story.

ISIL is an extremely dangerous organization. It has the elements of both a terrorist organization and an insurgent army. It kills innocent civilians, and has seized large amounts of territory in Iraq and Syria, which it can utilize for safe haven, training, command and control, and from which it can launch attacks. It engages in 30-40 attacks per month, has more than 20,000 fighters, and takes in as much as a million dollars a day from illicit oil sales, ransom payments, and other

illicit activities. Its public messaging and social media are as slick and as effective as any I've ever seen from a terrorist organization.

Though we know of no credible information that ISIL is planning to attack the homeland at present, we know that ISIL is prepared to kill innocent Americans they encounter because they are Americans – in a public and depraved manner. We know ISIL views the United States as an enemy, and we know that ISIL's leaders have themselves said they will soon be in “direct confrontation” with the United States.

On September 10th, President Obama delivered a speech to the Nation in which he outlined this government's response to ISIL.

The President has already begun a military campaign to take the fight to ISIL. To date, our military has launched well over 100 air strikes against ISIL in Iraq, to protect our personnel, critical infrastructure, and to support humanitarian activities there.

The United States will expand our efforts against ISIL, as part of a broad coalition of NATO allies and other allies in the region, reflecting the international community's condemnation of ISIL and its tactics. As part of this, we are pleased to see the formation of the new inclusive government in Iraq, with whom we intend to work closely. We look forward to this new government's addressing the rights and concerns of all of Iraq's diverse communities, and its leaders from across the political spectrum coming together to take a united stand against ISIL.

From the homeland security perspective, here is what we are doing:

First, to address the threats generally emanating from terrorist groups overseas, we have in recent weeks enhanced aviation security. Much of the terrorist threat continues to center around aviation security. In early July, I directed enhanced screening at 18 overseas airports with direct flights to the U.S. Several weeks later, we added six more airports to the list. Three weeks ago we added another airport, and additional screening of carry-on luggage. The United Kingdom and other countries have followed with similar enhancements to their aviation security. We continually evaluate whether more is necessary, without unnecessarily burdening the traveling public.

Longer term, as this committee has heard me say before, we are pursuing “pre-clearance” at overseas airports with flights to the U.S. This means inspection by a U.S. Customs and Border Protection officer and enhanced aviation security before a passenger gets on the plane to the U.S. We now have pre-clearance at airports in Ireland, the UAE, Canada and the Caribbean. I regard it as a homeland security imperative to build more. To use a football metaphor, I'd much rather defend our end-zone from the 50-yard line than our 1-yard line. I want to take every opportunity we have to expand homeland security beyond our borders.

Second, the Department of Homeland Security, the FBI, NCTC and other intelligence agencies are making enhanced and concerted efforts to track Syrian foreign fighters who come from or seek to enter this country. The reality is that more than 15,000 foreign fighters have traveled to Syria over the last three years, including approximately two thousand Westerners. We estimate

that more than 100 Americans have traveled or attempted to travel to Syria to join the fight there one way or another. We are concerned that not only may these foreign fighters join ISIL or other violent extremist groups in Syria, they may also be recruited by these violent extremist groups to leave Syria and conduct external attacks. The FBI has arrested a number of individuals who have tried to travel from the U.S. to Syria to support terrorist activities there.

Third, we are working with European and other governments to build better information sharing to track Syrian foreign fighters. Whenever I get together with my European counterparts, this topic is almost always item number one on the agenda. The importance of this issue is also reflected by the fact it will be a singular topic of discussion at a U.N. Security Council summit that the President will chair in two weeks. In the history of the U.N., this is only the second time a U.S. President has personally chaired a Security Council summit.

We are increasing efforts to track those who enter and leave Syria, and may later seek to travel to the United States from a country for which the United States does not require a visa from its citizens. There are in fact a number of Visa Waiver Program countries that also have large numbers of citizens who are Syrian foreign fighters. Generally, we have strong information-sharing relationships with these countries. But, with their help, we will enhance this capability. We need to ensure that we are doing all we can to identify those who, by their travel patterns, attempt to hide their association with terrorist groups.

We are encouraging more countries to join the United States in using tools like Advance Passenger Information and Passenger Name Record collection, which will help to identify terrorist travel patterns.

Fourth, within the U.S. government, DHS and our interagency partners in law enforcement and the intelligence community, are enhancing our ability to share information with each other about suspicious individuals.

Fifth, we are continually on guard against the potential domestic-based, home-grown terrorist who may be lurking in our own society: the independent actor or “lone wolf” who did not train at a terrorist camp or join the ranks of a terrorist organization overseas, but who is inspired here at home by a group’s social media, literature or violent extremist ideology. In many respects, this is the hardest terrorist threat to detect, and the one I worry most about.

To address the domestic “lone wolf” threat, I have directed that DHS build on our partnerships with state and local law enforcement in a way that enhances community relationships. The local police and fire departments are the first responders to any crisis in our homeland. The local police, more than the federal government, have their finger on the pulse of the local community from which a domestic terrorist may come.

To address the home-grown terrorist who may be lurking in our midst, we must also emphasize the need for help from the public. “If You See Something, Say Something” is more than a slogan. For example, last week we sent a private sector advisory identifying for retail businesses a long list of materials that could be used as explosive precursors, and the types of suspicious behavior that a retailer should look for from someone who buys a lot of these materials.

Within DHS, we have outreach programs with communities who themselves are engaging youth in violence prevention. I have directed that we step up these programs and I personally participate in them. In June I met with a Syrian-American community group in a Chicago suburb. Next week I will meet with a Somali community in Columbus, Ohio. In October, the White House will host a summit on domestic efforts to prevent violent extremism, and address the full lifecycle of radicalization to violence posed by foreign fighter threats. The efforts highlighted at this summit are meant to increase the participation of faith-based organizations, mental health providers, social service providers, and youth-affiliated groups in local efforts to counter violent extremism.

Over the last 13 years, we have vastly improved this Nation's ability to detect and disrupt terrorist plots overseas before they reach the homeland. Here at home, federal law enforcement does an excellent job, time and again, of identifying, investigating, arresting and prosecuting scores of individuals before they commit terrorist acts. But we continue to face real terrorist enemies and real terrorist threats and we must all remain vigilant.

As Secretary of Homeland Security, I see the full array of threats to our homeland every day, from the "lone wolf" to al Qaeda affiliates like Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (which has made repeated efforts to export terrorism to our homeland) to ISIL and its ranks of foreign fighters.

As long as the world remains a dangerous place, as long as there are threats to the homeland in any form from any individual or group, the dedicated men and women of DHS will remain vigilant. We will take all the appropriate steps to continue to protect the homeland, in accordance with our fundamental rights and liberties, and in close partnership with our federal, state, and local partners, the Congress and the American people. Thank you.