

**Opening Statement of the Honorable Ed Royce (R-CA), Chairman  
House Foreign Affairs Committee  
Hearing on “Al-Shabaab: How Great a Threat?”  
October 3, 2013**

(As prepared for delivery)

This hearing will come to order. Today we meet to assess the threat from al-Shabaab, al-Qaeda’s franchise in the Horn of Africa -- the threat it poses to Somalia, the region and potentially the United States.

Al-Shabaab – translated as “the youth” - officially swore allegiance to al-Qaeda in February 2012, although much of its leadership has been associated with Osama bin Laden and his successor, Ayman al-Zawahiri, for much longer. While al-Shabaab has been primarily focused on attacking the young Somali government and African peacekeepers working to secure that country, this is changing.

The dramatic September 21<sup>st</sup> attack on the Westgate shopping mall in Nairobi, Kenya demonstrates this group’s ability and desire to threaten innocent civilians throughout East Africa. In this horrible plot, over 70 were killed and over 200 wounded, including several Americans,.

This is not the first time this group has carried out a deadly strike in the region. In July 2010, it carried-out a series of bombings against civilians watching the final World Cup match in Kampala, Uganda, killing 74, including one American. Today, we are joined by the FBI agent who lead the Bureau’s investigation into that deadly Shabaab attack.

Last year, about a quarter of al-Shabaab’s attacks are said to have taken place in Kenya, a significant increase. For al-Shabaab, these attacks are retribution for a neighboring countries’ contribution of troops to the UN-authorized African Union peacekeeping mission in Somalia. This peacekeeping effort, which has made great strides, has been strongly backed by the United States and European Union.

Of considerable concern, al-Shabaab has demonstrated a unique ability to recruit young members of the Somali diaspora community in the United States and Europe to travel to Somali and join their fight. U.S. Africa Command suggests that these foreign fighters “remain the greatest threat to Western interests regionally and internationally.” One witness today calls the United States a “primary exporter of Western fighters to the al-Qaeda affiliated group.” Indeed, one of the first Americans to become a suicide bomber carried out his attack in Somalia. Online videos promise potential recruits a glamorous new life. We’ll hear today about one effort in the Somali-American community to counter such propaganda and recruitment.

Needless to say, we need to be on top of this al-Qaeda aligned group’s reach into the United States. Al-Qaeda leadership recently encouraged sympathizers in the U.S. to carry-out smaller, but still deadly attacks as individuals, or in teams of two or three.

Such strikes on U.S. soil could be similar to the one al-Shabaab launched against the mall in Kenya.

Al-Shabaab and other al-Qaeda elements have proven their ability to inspire and train attackers over the Internet, as demonstrated by the Boston Marathon bombers and the Fort Hood shooter.

Two years ago, when Dr. Jones appeared before the terrorism subcommittee I chaired to discuss the future of al-Qaeda, we discussed Shabaab. At the time, the head of Britain's MI5 was warning that, "it's only a matter of time before we see terrorism on our streets inspired by those who are today fighting alongside al-Shabaab." Given our support for the African peacekeeping mission, and the fact that the U.S. remains a top al-Qaeda target, we need to get ahead of al-Shabaab's efforts to radicalize vulnerable youth, before that statement applies to American streets.

I will now turn to our ranking member for his opening remarks.