

**Opening Statement of the Honorable Ed Royce (R-CA), Chairman
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
Hearing on “Al-Qaeda’s Resurgence in Iraq: A Threat to U.S. Interests”
February 5, 2013**

(As Prepared for Delivery)

This hearing will come to order. This morning we consider al-Qaeda’s resurgence in Iraq.

An unfortunate reality is that al-Qaeda in Iraq, now known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham ISIS, is growing steadily in size, power and influence. Its militant ranks have blossomed. Last summer, ISIS carried out attacks on two Iraqi prisons, freeing hundreds of experienced al-Qaeda fighters and leaders. The group is now able to carry out approximately 40 mass casualty attacks per month. Multiple car bombings struck the capital this morning. The nearly 9,000 deaths in Iraq last year made it the bloodiest since U.S. forces departed in 2011.

The civil war in neighboring Syria only further strengthens this group. Militants are able to flow freely between Iraq and Syria, providing ISIS an advantage as it works to advance its regional vision of a radical Islamist state.

Their gains have been dramatic. Last month, these fighters took advantage of a security vacuum in Iraq’s Anbar Province – entering the cities of Fallujah and Ramadi in columns of trucks mounted with heavy machine guns and raising their black flag over government buildings.

Of course, Anbar Province is where U.S. Marines fought so hard to push out al-Qaeda. In recognizing those and other great sacrifices, I should note that this Committee benefits from the first-hand experiences of Mr. Kinzinger, Mr. Cotton, Mr. Perry, Mr. DeSantis, Mr. Collins and Ms. Gabbard – all of whom served with distinction in Iraq.

This threat is evolving. Earlier this week, al-Qaeda’s central leadership declared that those operating in western Iraq and Syria were no longer an affiliated group. We will see how this power struggle develops, but ISIS’ independence is a reflection of its unprecedented resources, including weapons, personnel and cash and its resulting operational strength. This is a threat to Iraq, but also us. ISIS has reportedly been actively recruiting individuals capable of traveling to the U.S. to carry-out attacks.

While al-Qaeda in Iraq has been powered by prison breaks and the Syrian civil war, it has also been fueled by the alienation of much of the Sunni population from the Shi’a dominated government in Baghdad. Al-Qaeda has become very skilled at exploiting this sectarian rift; and Maliki’s power grab has given them much ammunition. This is a point that Ranking Member Engel and I underscored with President Maliki when he visited Washington last fall.

This Committee will play a central role as the United States moves to send military equipment to help the Iraqis fight these terrorists. Appropriate intelligence can be shared too. But Iraqis should know that their relations with Iran and the slow pace of political reconciliation with

minority groups raise serious congressional concerns. While he may not be up to it, Maliki must take steps to lead Iraq to a post-sectarian era.

The Iraqi government is *far* from perfect. And only the Iraqis can control their future. But if we *don't* want to see an Iraq with large swaths of territory under militant control, and we shouldn't, we must be willing to lend an appropriate hand.

I'll now turn to the Ranking Member, Mr. Engel, for any opening comments.