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Opening Statement of the Honorable **Ed Royce (R-CA), Chairman**
Joint Hearing:
House Foreign Affairs Committee
House Homeland Security Committee
The Rise of Radicalism: Growing Terrorist Sanctuaries and the Threat to
the U.S. Homeland
November 18, 2015

(As prepared for delivery)

Thank you Chairman McCaul. With room to operate abroad, it was only a matter of time before Islamist terrorists struck, hitting Paris, again. They are looking to strike us too.

A core finding of the 9/11 Commission was that terrorists should be allowed “no sanctuaries.” The reason is simple: with safe haven, terrorists have the time and space to indoctrinate, plan and strengthen – and then take the fight to their enemies. In this case, anyone who does not share ISIS’ apocalyptic worldview is an apostate who must be destroyed – not something easily “contained,” as the Administration suggests.

The 9/11 Commissioners would likely be dismayed to have watched ISIS take over more and more territory between Iraq and Syria – and sit mainly uncontested. As one observer wrote this month, “The terrorists’ own playbook sees the taking and holding of territory as a necessary step to discredit Western democracy and prove that the Caliphate is a real political possibility in the 21st century.”

While ISIS has taken losses, its fighting force has not shrunk – thanks in part to a steady stream of foreign recruits. More than 30,000 fighters have made it to Syria and Iraq from more than 100 countries. Of those, it is estimated that more than 4,500 hold western passports – including at least 250 Americans. In France’s case, 1,800 of its citizens are believed to be entrenched in jihadist networks. This “terrorist diaspora” is a skip away from Europe – and a plane ride to the United States.

And with the Internet now serving as a “virtual caliphate,” young radicals don’t have to travel abroad to become indoctrinated or receive terrorist training. Indeed, the FBI has revealed that it is investigating ISIS suspects in all 50 states. As Director Comey noted, ISIS’s slick propaganda sends a “siren song” that goes like this: “Troubled soul, come to the caliphate, you will live a life of glory... And if you can’t come, kill somebody where you are.” That includes in the U.S.

As is often said, the best defense is a good offense. But this Administration has not wanted to play offense. When it had the chance to hit ISIS from the air early on, the White House sat paralyzed. Instead of pummeling ISIS territory, the White House is still proceeding with pinpricks. Last week, Secretary Kerry reported that the President has decided to “pick up the pace” against ISIS. What on earth have they been waiting for?

Worse, our defenses aren't where they should be. A year after the U.N. Security Council acted to curb travel by foreign fighters, only 12 countries have databases allowing for quick risk assessments of travelers. New technologies are making it harder for our authorities to keep up with would be killers. And our government is still floundering in understanding and combating the radicalization process.

It's easy to view these problems as being "over there," but like it or not, our national security is ever more connected to the chaos unfolding in Syria, Libya and other sanctuaries. This reality can feel overwhelming at times. But unfortunately, the wave of radicalism around the globe shows no signs of receding – making it essential for us to have a broad, overarching strategy for Syria and beyond.

It was also the 9/11 Commission that criticized the U.S. government for being too "stovepiped." Congress isn't immune to poor communication and coordination. So it makes sense for our Committees to work together on a topic like this. I look forward to this timely hearing.