

STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER JACKIE SPEIER (D-CA)

“Boko Haram--Emerging Threat to the U.S. Homeland”

Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence

**November 30, 2011 at 10:00 AM
311 Cannon House Office Building**

Thank you for holding today’s hearing on the Nigerian terrorist organization Boko Haram and the threat the group may pose to the United States.

I would like to welcome our witnesses today and look forward to gaining insights into the group itself as well as ways we can partner with the Nigerians to help combat terrorism.

Boko Haram, a terrorist organization based in northern Nigeria, has been drawing increased attention by conducting a campaign of violence against the Nigerian government, and in an apparent and possibly game changing escalation, a recent attack against the UN headquarters in the Nigerian capital.

The group has apparently continued to expand their target set, and on November 5th, the US Embassy in Abuja, issued an emergency message to all US citizens in Nigeria that Boko Haram was planning to attack Western hotels in Abuja.

Boko Haram has expanded their capabilities and operations rapidly, but, in part due to their rapid rise, very little is known about the group and little international attention has been focused on it.

That’s why I am proud today to be releasing a report on Boko Haram with Chairman Meehan.

This report pulls together the disparate pieces of open source media available on the group in order to present the fullest picture yet of the threat posed by Boko Haram, including whether or not it has the intent and capability to attack the United States, and options for U.S. engagement and assistance to the Nigerian government to counter this threat.

Hopefully this report, and our discussion today, can raise awareness of an evolving terrorist organization whose list of targets has now expanded to include the international community and could include the United States Homeland.

What makes Boko Haram particularly concerning is how quickly it has grown over the past few years from a local militia to a more complex terror organization which, earlier this month, carried out a series of coordinated suicide bombings in several cities across the country, killing dozens of people.

Boko Haram has been able to expand its reach from a traditional northeast power base southward, to the capital Abuja, and reportedly even further south.

The most notable example of Boko Haram’s evolving capabilities and ambitions is the suicide car bomb attack the group executed against the UN headquarters in Abuja, which reportedly killed 23 people.

The attack signaled a willingness on the part of Boko Haram to attack international targets and may signify a shift towards a more global militant ideology. Perhaps the most troubling aspect of the threat

posed by Boko Haram is the reports of increasing ties between the group and other terrorist groups, including AQIM in North Africa and al Shabaab in Somalia.

This reported commingling of weapons, tactics, and personnel among these groups may be one reason that Boko Haram has reportedly been able to quickly develop its bomb making expertise and tactics.

There is still too much we do not know about Boko Haram, including its membership strength, leadership cadre, and the true nature of its ties to other terrorist organizations.

We must learn more about Boko Haram so that we do not underestimate the threat they may pose, as has happened in the past with other terrorist groups such as AQAP and al Shabaab.

The Subcommittee calls for the U.S. government to increase information sharing with the Nigerian government, and outreach with the Nigerian people, particularly the Muslims in the north, to better understand the underlying factors contributing to such extremism and to the appeal of a group like Boko Haram. That is prudent.

But until we can learn more about this group, their intentions to strike the United States, and the extent and exact nature of their cooperation with other terror groups on the continent, we must be cautious with proceeding towards any major new commitments in Nigeria.

I do not believe this hearing should telegraph a desire for United States engagement in another international theater; rather, this report and hearing today should serve as a solid starting point to raise awareness of a potential new threat and spur further discussion and examination to build an effective strategy for dealing with Boko Haram.