

## **Ranking Member Brian Higgins Opening Statement**

### **“Terrorism in Africa: The Imminent Threat to the United States”**

#### **Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence**

**Wednesday, April 29, 2015**

Violent Islamist extremists in Africa are not a new phenomenon. Al Qaeda’s bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998 demonstrated its reach and ability to recruit from Africa’s Muslim communities. Groups in Algeria and Somalia later affiliated themselves with Al Qaeda. Foreign fighter flows from North and East Africa to Afghanistan and Iraq have long been of international concern, as are flows to Syria.

High-profile extremist attacks have intensified in recent years, including mass casualty bombings in Uganda, Nigeria, and Somalia; attacks on U.S. facilities in Benghazi and Tunis in 2012 and U.N. facilities in Algeria, Nigeria, and Somalia; deadly sieges at Algeria’s In Amenas gas plant and Kenya’s Westgate Mall in 2013; the 2014 abduction of more than 270 Nigerian schoolgirls; executions of Christians in Libya; and the recent attacks on Tunisia’s Bardo Museum and a university in Garissa, Kenya, among others.

Those are a few examples on a growing list. Specifically, Al Qaeda operatives and other violent Islamist extremist groups have had a presence in East Africa for two decades. In the 1990s, Sudan hosted foreign extremists, including Osama bin Laden.

Al Shabaab emerged in predominately Muslim Somalia in the early 2000s amid a proliferation of Islamist and clan-based militias that flourished in the absence of central government authority. Some of its founding members trained and fought with Al Qaeda in Afghanistan, and known Al Qaeda operatives were associated with the group during its founding. Today, Al Shabaab continues to wage a violent campaign against the Somali government, AU forces, and international targets in Somalia.

Al Shabaab activity in Kenya has also increased significantly in recent years; more than 600 people have been killed in its attacks there since 2012. Its leaders have issued repeated threats against U.S. and Western targets in Somalia and beyond, and have called for strikes against the United States. A February 2015 video from the group advocated attacks in Kenya and abroad, and named several shopping malls in Europe and the United States as potential targets, including Minnesota’s Mall of America.

On January 1, 2008, my neighbor and constituent, John Granville and his driver, Abdel Rahman Abbas, were killed while promoting free and fair elections in South Sudan on behalf of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). Mr. Granville and Mr. Abbas were killed by Islamic extremists after leaving the British Embassy. Today, two of his killers are believed to be among Al Shabaab’s ranks. I am still pushing the U.S. Department of State to pressure the Government of Sudan to bring about justice for Mr. Granville and Mr. Abbas.

When we look at these kinds of attacks it is important to keep them in the proper context, while remaining aware and vigilant. I look forward to a robust discussion with our witnesses today about terrorist groups in Africa, their rivalries for resources, recruits, and territory, and how we can shape U.S. policy to counter their efforts.