



COMMITTEE ON
**HOMELAND
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Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)

The Persistent Threat: al Qaeda's Evolution and Resilience

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The turmoil and unrest in Iraq and Syria have created a welcomed vacuum for al Qaeda. Some would argue that ISIS pioneered a new narrative and more accessible terrorist recruitment messages. However, our committee has known that for decades that the al Qaeda extremist ideologies and communications are just as accessible and widespread. It is clear that al Qaeda's leadership has been weakened by enhanced intelligence and covert operations.

As a way of retreating in order to rebuild, al Qaeda sought refuge through the turmoil in some countries in order to grow more operatives and to radicalize vulnerable populations. Gone are the days of Pakistani and Yemeni based al Qaeda leaders pushing down directives to field members. Instead, the terrorist organization has found the need to be more flexible and to create a more decentralized structure—similar to ISIS.

More than a year ago, we learned that al Qaeda operatives were beginning to build and grow their Syrian affiliate, the al Nusra Front, in order to compete with ISIS in Syria. If ISIS is considered the fast-acting, flashy terrorist group, al Qaeda could be described as the more deliberate, methodological group.

For example, al Qaeda resisted creating a "caliphate," but instead focused on the establishing conditions and underground networks that would lend to their long-term goals. The changes that al Qaeda has made in Syria has ultimately led to a resurgence of its global brand and introduced the terrorist organization to a new crop of recruits.

This group is made up of those who have become disillusioned with ISIS and its members or are drawn to the history and mission-focused goals of al Qaeda. It is true, that by some strange twist of fate, ISIS has refocused and helped to rejuvenate al Qaeda.

As we hear from witnesses today, I hope that we can learn more about what al Qaeda looks like going in their third decade of terrorist destruction. Moreover, I hope to get concrete recommendations about how new policies under the Trump Administration can be shaped to ensure that the Obama Administration's numerous successes and strides at countering and reducing al Qaeda's capacity and leadership remain in place and are improved.

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