

## **Ranking Member Kathleen Rice Opening Statement**

### **Counterterrorism and Intelligence Subcommittee**

#### **“Terrorism in North Africa: An Examination of the Threat”**

**Wednesday March 29, 2017**

About two years ago, I had the opportunity to travel to Africa on a Congressional delegation led by Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, and meet with government leaders and security officials in Tunisia, Chad, Djibouti, Kenya and Senegal.

That trip was just a few months after I was sworn in to Congress and joined this committee, and it was an instructive experience for me. Because while groups like ISIS may have dominated headlines at the time, as they often do now, it’s critical that we never lose sight of the fact that the threat of terrorism doesn’t start and stop with ISIS.

That trip made it clear to me that the threat of terrorism emerging in Africa is very real and cannot be ignored or overlooked until it generates more headlines. We need to confront that threat head-on, and our ability to do so depends heavily on the strength of partnerships with leaders who fight on the front lines against these terrorist groups every day.

We don’t have to look far to see how serious of a threat we’re dealing with in Africa, particularly in North Africa.

A truck bomb was detonated last year near a police training college in Libya, killing 60 policemen and wounding about 200 others. A commercial plane bombing in Egypt in October 2015 killed 224 people. An attack at a tourist resort in Tunisia in June 2015 left 38 dead. And of course, the attack on the U.S. Embassy and CIA annex in Benghazi, Libya which left four U.S. citizens dead, including the U.S. Ambassador to Libya, J. Christopher Stevens.

While ISIS has taken credit for many recent attacks, Al Qaeda operatives and other violent extremists groups have had a presence in North Africa for almost two decades. For example, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Magreb – AQIM – had primarily operated in the northern coastal areas of Algeria and in parts of the desert regions of southern Algeria, but in recent years has expanded into Libya and Tunisia. AQIM claimed responsibility for many terror attacks in the region and has been responsible for kidnappings for ransom and smuggling.

Most concerning, according to U.S. officials, AQIM has focused on local and Western targets in North and West Africa, including U.S. interests and personnel, by often urging supporters to target U.S. embassies and U.S. ambassadors.

Earlier this month, the head of the U.S. Africa Command, testified before the Senate and

characterized the instability in Libya and North Africa as potentially “the most significant near-term threat to U.S and allies’ interests on the continent...”

Protecting our assets and people in this region is absolutely a national security priority for our country right now – but I’m concerned that this administration doesn’t seem to recognize that.

President Trump’s so-called “America First” budget seems to put Africa last, proposing deep budget cuts to the continent. In fact, many have speculated that confronting the threat of terrorism in Libya and throughout the region will be low priority for this Administration.

By proposing to cut the Department of State’s international affairs funding by one third, President Trump has signaled that he is not interested in maintaining longstanding international partnerships, which are crucial for U.S. diplomacy and development across the globe, including in North Africa.

As I said, I believe that our success in confronting the threat in Africa depends on the success of our partners leading this fight on the ground. And while President Trump may not have a sophisticated understanding of the value of diplomacy, we cannot allow that to jeopardize the partnerships we’ve built in North Africa.

The terrorist threat to the U.S. homeland since 9/11 has continued to evolve, and our counterterrorism policies must evolve as well – they cannot be singularly focused on prevention only within our borders.

It is imperative that the U.S. works with our allies to improve counterterrorism and intelligence efforts in North Africa – as well as investing in education, economic development, and free and open civil societies – in order to root out many of the drivers of violent extremism in the region.

The level of U.S. funding, resources, and personnel dedicated to these efforts must continue, if not increase, in order to limit the risk and progress of terrorist groups in the region.

Again, we cannot underestimate the value of building and strengthening local and international partnerships to combat terrorism and radicalization in North Africa. International cooperation and partnerships are the foundation of our counterterrorism efforts.

I look forward to a robust discussion with our witnesses today about the threat of terrorism and radicalization in North Africa and how we can shape U.S. policy to support our partners and defeat our enemies.