



# Committee on Foreign Affairs

CHAIRMAN ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN



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## Opening Statement

### **“LRA, Boko Haram, al Shabaab, AQIM and Other Sources of Instability in Africa”**

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The 1998 bombings of our embassies in Kenya and Tanzania marked the first major attacks directed against United States interests by Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda network. Four years later, al-Qaeda operatives struck again, killing 15 people in an Israeli-owned hotel near Mombasa, Kenya, and simultaneously firing missiles at an Israeli passenger jet taking off from Mombasa's airport.

Further, the 2010 arrest of three west-African al-Qaeda operatives on drug smuggling charges demonstrated the link between South American narco-groups and Islamist extremist groups in western Africa. In short, Islamic extremist and terrorist organizations, many of whom are linked to al-Qaeda, have been aggressively increasing their operations in Africa. It is imperative that the U.S. remain vigilant and work to destroy al-Qaeda and others who threaten our security, our interests, and our critical allies.

The Lord’s Resistance Army, or LRA, has spurred much attention largely due to the tireless efforts by young student activists to raise awareness about Joseph Kony, his circle of thugs, and the need to bring them to justice for the atrocities committed against innocent civilians. The LRA, which currently operates in remote border areas of Central African Republic, South Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, has wreaked havoc.

The LRA targets remote villages, slaughtering innocent civilians and abducting women and children to serve as soldiers, porters, and sex slaves. Upon abduction, children are commanded to commit extremely violent and brutal acts in front of their families and then forced to fight on the front lines for the LRA. Under the direction of Kony, LRA commanders mutilate innocent victims by cutting off their lips, ears and noses in attempts to terrorize villages and silence any opposition to his agenda.

In May 2010, the President signed into the law the Lord’s Resistance Army Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act. This law required the President to develop a comprehensive strategy to deal with the LRA and declared that it is the policy of the United States to provide political, economic, military, and intelligence support for multilateral efforts to protect civilians, apprehend or eliminate top LRA commanders, and disarm and demobilize LRA fighters.

The President’s strategy was released in November 2010 and set four strategic objectives: increased protection of civilians, apprehension or “removal” of Kony and other senior LRA commanders, promotion of defections from the LRA and the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of remaining LRA combatants, and provision of humanitarian relief to affected areas. On Monday of this week, the President announced that the U.S. will continue the deployment of a small number of U.S. military advisors to assist regional forces combating this menace.

Turning to Libya, the situation there has created additional challenges to our counterterrorism efforts as weapons from Libya are trafficked throughout the region to extremist groups. In North Africa and the Sahel, after successfully acquiring weapons from Libya this year, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, (AQIM), poses a significant threat to the region.

In 2006, AQIM formally merged with al-Qaeda and is now considered to be one of al-Qaeda's most robust affiliates and is pursuing a sophisticated, global jihadist agenda, including by targeting Western interests. A recent report by the Africa Center for Strategic Studies warns that "With deepening roots in local communities and the regional economy, AQIM is developing enhanced resilience against counterterror efforts."

Al Shabaab, a U.S. - designated Foreign Terrorist Organization, is considered to be one of the most deadly extremist groups in the world and their recent merging with al-Qaeda only magnifies the threat and the need for increased cooperation. The merging of al-Qaeda and al Shabaab has made al Shabaab more sophisticated in its use of guerilla tactics and improvised explosive devices (IEDs). The recruitment and fundraising activities of al Shabaab here in the United States is of extreme concern, as are reported links between al Shabaab with al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.

In Nigeria, Boko Haram, which refers to itself as the Nigerian Taliban, has grown increasingly bold and deadly. Boko Haram's 2011 suicide attack against the U.N. headquarters in Abuja demonstrates its capability to attack international targets with tactics similar to those of al-Qaeda.

We cannot afford to ignore this threat. We must not allow al-Qaeda to establish a foothold in the region.

While Islamist extremism is on the rise in Africa, the State Department's FY 2013 budget request would decrease funding to the Trans-Sahara Counter-Terrorism Partnership by 14.5% from the FY 2012 estimates. In comparison, the State Department's FY 2013 budget request for Global Climate Change Initiatives in Sub-Saharan Africa is \$79.4 million.

In 2008, the Government Accountability Office issued a report entitled, "*Combating Terrorism: Action Needed to Enhance Implementation of Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership.*" In the report, GAO found that, currently, no comprehensive strategy guides the implementation of the Trans-Sahara Counter-Terrorism Partnership and documents used in planning do not prioritize proposed activities or identify milestones needed to measure progress. It has been almost four years since the report was issued and the State Department has taken no action to implement the recommendations. The inconsistencies on the issue of counterterrorism in a region where Islamist extremism is on the rise is extremely concerning. We ask our State Department witnesses to discuss the steps being undertaken to immediately address the critical deficiencies identified by the GAO.

Last month, General Carter Ham, commander of the U.S. Africa Command, in testimony before the House Armed Services Committee stated that: "The potential for support and strengthening of ties between these three groups (al Shabaab, AQIM, and Boko Haram) with al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and al-Qaeda senior leaders in Pakistan is of particular concern and requires constant monitoring." We must not turn a blind eye to Africa. I would like to applaud our current partners on the African continent for their constant vigilance and efforts to counter combat extremist ideology in the region. Responsible nations must always be on guard as Islamist extremist groups seek to extend their global reach.