



State of Homeland Security Address

Chairman Michael McCaul (R-TX)

House Homeland Security Committee

December 7, 2015

San Bernardino Terrorist Attack

“Just last week terrorists struck again on American soil, attacking our nation from within—and committing their deeds in the name of ISIS, the new standard-bearer of evil.”

“Our own city streets are now the front lines. Indeed, San Bernardino was not an isolated event. Terrorists are on the offensive, working to deploy operatives to our shores and to radicalize our citizens to commit acts of violence.”

“This incident should not just be a wake-up call. It should be a call to action. For far too long, we have allowed extremists to reclaim their momentum, surging from terrorist cells into full-fledged terrorist armies.”

“...just days ago the President said America was safe from an ISIS attack. Shortly after, the San Bernardino terrorists launched their massacre...We cannot be blind to the threat before us.”

“If you add San Bernardino to the list, there have now been 19 ISIS-connected terrorist plots or attacks here at home. These include plans to murder tourists on Florida beaches, to set off pipe bombs on Capitol Hill, to detonate explosives at New York City landmarks, and to live-stream an attack at an American college campus.”

The State of Homeland Security, 2015: A Pivotal Year

“Today we are engaged in [a] generational struggle. And this year was a turning point.”

“I believe the state of our homeland is increasingly not secure. And I believe 2015 will be seen as a watershed year in this long war—the year when our enemies gained an upper hand and when the spread of terror once again awoke the West.”

“In fact, I believe [a] leadership void has put the United States homeland in the highest threat environment since 9/11.”

“The overall uptick in extremist activity has made 2015 the single most active year for homegrown terror we have ever tracked. In fact, there were more homegrown terror cases in the first six months of 2015 than any full year since 9/11.”

“Our intelligence and law enforcement professionals have stopped many attacks. However, in a world where terror has gone viral, we are struggling to monitor every threat. As we saw in Garland, Texas, the first sign of a hatched plot might be an internet hashtag, tweeted only minutes before an attack. Or as we saw in San Bernardino, it might be a Facebook status pledging allegiance to terrorists, posted online with little notice.”

The Rise of ISIS and Costs of Inaction

“ISIS is not contained—it is expanding at great cost to the free world. In November, the group managed to conduct three major terrorist attacks on three separate continents in just three weeks. And now they have inspired an attack on our homeland.”

“This is not a terrorist group on the run. It is a terrorist group on the march. And their ability to conduct external operations is growing. ISIS has been linked to more than 60 terrorist plots or attacks against Western targets. It has established a presence in 19 countries. And it has recruited operatives from more than 100 nations—creating the largest global convergence of jihadists in history.”

“ISIS is now more dangerous than al Qaeda ever was under Osama bin Laden. Far from being over, this long war is entering into its most daunting phase yet.”

“Yet the President’s National Security Strategy released this year outlines a doctrine of ‘strategic patience’ for confronting threats. This is reckless. America cannot adopt a wait-and-see approach while the world burns and terrorists plot within our borders. We are called upon to lead.”

“...if we let Islamist terrorism gain further ground, we will be talking about a struggle that lasts more than just a generation. From the streets of Paris to the skies of Egypt, we have been reminded of the destructive power of this movement and the insidious ideology that fuels it.”

“We have also been reminded that delay can be deadly. When we see terror in more Western cities; when ISIS declares new provinces; and when millions of additional refugees flood the shores of our allies, it will be further proof that inaction has serious consequences.”

Combating Domestic Radicalization

“...we need to focus on preventing radicalization as much as we need to focus on stopping acts of terror themselves. Yet the Administration is not doing enough to keep Americans from being recruited by groups like ISIS.”

“There is too little outreach to vulnerable communities, there is virtually no effort here at home to combat terrorist propaganda directed at our citizens, and there are few credible ‘off-ramps’ to peel radicalized young people away from the path to terrorist violence. This is unacceptable. Americans are being recruited by terrorist groups at the speed of broadband, but we are responding at the speed of bureaucracy.”

“Our Committee unanimously approved bipartisan legislation to accelerate prevention efforts in the homeland. In the wake of the shooting in California, I am working to get this bill passed quickly.”

Closing Terrorist Pathways into America

“We also need to do everything we can to block terrorist routes into our country and to keep Americans from going to train in extremist safe havens. That is why earlier this year I launched a bipartisan Congressional *Task Force on Combating Terrorist and Foreign Fighter Travel*. In their **final report** released in September, the Task

Force concluded that the U.S. government has largely failed to stop Americans from going overseas to join extremists, and they identified gaping security gaps which allow terrorists to cross borders undetected.”

“We must do more—urgently—to shut down the jihadi superhighway to and from the conflict zone. Our Task Force issued over 50 recommendations for fixing security vulnerabilities in America and overseas, and today I am pleased to announce that we are turning these recommendations into law.”

“We are starting with **a bill** this week to tighten the security of the Visa Waiver Program, which allows travelers from 38 countries to come to the United States for 90 days without getting a visa. Our bill is strong, bipartisan, and will address problems identified by the Task Force.”

“But this is just the beginning. Over the coming weeks, we will introduce a slate of new bills to keep terrorists from crossing borders. This will include enhancing the security of the visa process, developing a national strategy to combat terrorist travel, improving information sharing here at home, and helping foreign partners address security weaknesses.”

“Our government must also move swiftly to improve the screening of Syrian and Iraqi refugees. ISIS has said in their own words that they want to exploit the refugee process to infiltrate the West.”

“They did exactly that to attack Paris, and I can reveal today that individuals tied to terrorist groups in Syria have already tried to gain entry to our country through the U.S. refugee program. Accordingly, I drafted legislation to create the most robust national security vetting process in U.S. history to screen Syrian and Iraqi refugees. And it passed the House with a bipartisan, veto-proof majority. In light of the threats we face, I urge the Senate to act on our legislation and the President to sign it.”

Terrorist Communications in “Dark Space”

“No longer do terrorists plot using couriers and caves. Today they hide their messages in ‘dark space,’ using encrypted applications and other secure platforms to evade law enforcement. This is one of the greatest counterterrorism challenges of the 21st Century. And it is one of the biggest fears that keeps me up at night.”

“When the Administration says there are no known, credible threats to the homeland, it means less today than it once did—because we cannot stop what we cannot see.”

“We should be careful not to vilify ‘encryption’ itself, which is essential for privacy, data security, and global commerce. But I have personally been briefed on cases where terrorists communicated in darkness and where we couldn’t shine a light, even with a lawful warrant.”

“Unfortunately, there are no simple answers. This is more than a ‘privacy vs. security’ challenge. It’s ‘security vs. security.’”

“It is time for Congress to act because the White House has failed to bring all parties together—transparently—to find solutions. That is why today I am calling for the creation of a national commission on security and technology challenges in the digital age.”

“I plan to unveil legislation soon which would establish this commission under Congressional authorization and would bring together the technology sector, privacy and civil liberties groups, academics, and the law enforcement community to find common ground. This will not be like other blue ribbon panels, established and forgotten. The threats are real, so this legislation will require the commission to develop a range of actionable recommendations that protect privacy and public safety.”

Path to Victory in Syria

“Finally, and most importantly, we must recognize that the best homeland defense is a good offense. We will not win the war against Islamist terror until we take fight to the enemy and deprive them of their safe havens. This was the top recommendation of the 9/11 commission, yet we have failed to live up to it.”

“We need to drain the swamp in Syria and Iraq, or the swamp will come to us. Unfortunately, the President lacks a coherent military strategy, and he has tied our general’s hands behind their backs.”

“These are the immediate steps we need to take to turn the tide: First, we must remove the limitations that have kept us from hitting ISIS as hard as we can. This means loosening the rules of engagement from the air, letting our special operations forces get directly involved in the fight, and arming opposition groups more quickly and completely.”

“Second, we must carve out the space needed to protect the moderate opposition and to alleviate the humanitarian crisis. I’ve spoken with ambassadors from Turkey, Iraq, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia, and they agree with me that we need a no-fly zone over part of Syria and safe zones where refugees can be relocated and protected.”

“Third, the United States must lead a broader global coalition on the ground to destroy ISIS in Syria, one that includes NATO and features deeper involvement from our regional allies. This includes Sunni Arab partners who must help build an indigenous ground force to clean up their own backyard and to protect their religion from these fanatics.”

Global Terror Strategy

“Since the President failed to develop an ‘on-the-ground’ plan to confront ISIS, we now need an ‘around-the-globe’ strategy to defeat them. This is no longer just about Syria and Iraq. It is about stopping the march of ISIS across North Africa, keeping it from getting a foothold in South Asia, and preventing countries like Afghanistan from falling back into darkness.”

“Yet in all of these places, President Obama is more inclined to tell us what he won’t do, rather than what he will. That is why we need a global strategy to win the war against Islamist terror—and a president prepared to commit the resources and political will to make it a reality.”

“...we cannot be satisfied with quick victories and temporary safety in the war against Islamist terror. We must be prepared to keep radicals on the run and stop them from passing the torch to a new generation of terrorists.”

###