

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****Unrest in the Middle East and North Africa: Ramifications for U.S. Homeland Security***

April 6, 2011 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Counterterrorism and Intelligence subcommittee hearing entitled “Unrest in the Middle East and North Africa: Ramifications for U.S. Homeland Security”:

“There are many questions about how the events unfolding in the Middle East and North Africa will impact us here at home. The situation is changing every single day, and tyranny is being challenged in all corners of the region.

Two countries have already removed their leaders, and the people have begun the process of rebuilding their countries in a more equitable way. In Yemen, the people are still fighting to change the status quo and gain more economic and political freedoms for all. And in Libya, rebels with the help of NATO are struggling to end the 42 year rule of a ruthless dictator.

Because of the fragile conditions in the region, however, we have to be smart about how we frame the issues and how we react to developments. We must work to ensure that our words and actions do not inflame an already hostile environment. We must operate with facts and sound intelligence, not hyperbole and speculation.

While we embrace the spread of democracy across the Middle East and North Africa, we must also be realistic about the challenges ahead.

Many countries have suspended their constitutions, dismissed their governments, and replaced their ruling parties. In some cases we will have a blank slate to work with, and we may need to build new alliances to forge effective counterterrorism partnerships. But with a growing thirst for democracy now on our side, these challenges can be more freely addressed.

Nonetheless, the terrorists also seek to take advantage of the chaos, and al Qaeda and their affiliates have also applauded the unrest just as loudly as we have. But their applause rings hollow.

Like many experts, I believe the uprisings represent the people's aspirations for greater political rights and economic opportunities, not for extremism and violence. These terrorists seem to be grasping for relevancy in a mass movement that is largely passing them by.

Still, we must remain vigilant and guard against these small but vocal strains of evildoers. Because, while the threat of terrorists exploiting the instability is real, the possibilities for good are endless.”

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