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Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

Denying Terrorist Safe Havens: Homeland Security's Efforts to Counter Threats from Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen

June 3, 2011 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Oversight, Investigations, and Management subcommittee hearing entitled “Denying Terrorist Safe Havens: Homeland Security’s Efforts to Counter Threats from Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen”:

“Last month, the United States achieved a major milestone in our ongoing effort to secure our homeland from acts of terrorism.

The killing of Osama bin Laden, without a doubt, made the United States, in particular, and the entire world, in general, a safer place to live.

However, it did not remove the ongoing threat from terrorist forces that continue to seek to do us harm.

We know that terrorists rely on safe havens to organize, plan, raise funds, communicate, recruit, train and operate in relative obscurity.

They also use safe havens to plan attacks - some of which focus on killing innocent Americans - in an effort to further their ideological goals.

These safe havens provide security for terrorists because in these areas they are able to operate outside of the law, in uncontrolled territory, with little or no government interference.

In August 2010, the Department of State identified thirteen terrorist safe havens, including areas in Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen.

These areas experience widespread terrorist activities that illustrate the danger in identified safe haven locations.

According to the National Counterterrorism Center, in 2010 alone, there were approximately 200 terrorist attacks in Yemen, more than 580 in Somalia and 1,331 in Pakistan.

Terrorists from these countries have also sought to attack United States interests.

For example, al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, or AQAP, which operates in Yemen, claimed responsibility for the attempted 2009 Christmas Day bombing of a plane headed to the United States; in addition to the attempted package bombings on U.S.-bound aircraft in October 2010.

Congress has mandated that the U.S. Government issue reports that identify where terrorist safe havens exist and assess U.S. Government efforts in addressing them.

The reporting of this vital information to Congress is the first step in ensuring Congressional oversight of Government-wide efforts in denying terrorist safe havens and taking efforts to dismantle and disrupt their existence.

Unless the U.S. identifies where safe havens are located and the steps being taken to protect the homeland in light of their existence, Congress cannot fully measure the adequacy of U.S. efforts.

Unfortunately, GAO will release a report today that indicates that since 2004 Federal Government agencies have not fully complied with Congressional reporting requirements.

As a result, not once has Congress received a comprehensive government-wide list of U.S. efforts to deny safe haven to terrorists, as required by law.

Last year, several efforts were implemented to improve the U.S. Government response to addressing terrorist safe havens.

The 2010 National Security Strategy declared that “denying safe haven to terrorists is an essential component of the U.S. strategy to defeat al Qaeda and its affiliates.”

Furthermore, the 2010 National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2010 reiterated safe haven reporting requirements and I am pleased to learn that for the first time ever, a more comprehensive report is underway.”

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