

NEWS ALERT



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Homeland Security Committee

Rep. Bennie G. Thompson, Ranking Member



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

### ***Homegrown Terrorism: The Threat to Military Communities Inside the United States***

December 7, 2011 (Washington) – Today, House Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the **joint House-Senate hearing** entitled “Homegrown Terrorism: The Threat to Military Communities Inside the United States”:

“I want to thank the Chairman for holding this hearing. I also want to welcome our colleagues from the Senate who have joined us today. This hearing will examine the steps the military has taken to ensure the safety of its bases, installations, and recruiting stations.

In the last two years, two attacks on American military installations within the United States have been successful. One attack occurred at Fort Hood, Texas, where thirteen people were killed. In the Fort Hood incident, the defendant is still awaiting a military court-martial.

A second attack occurred in a recruiting station in Little Rock, Arkansas. One person was killed and one person was wounded. In the Little Rock case, the defendant pled guilty to murder in state court.

I imagine my colleagues on the other side of the aisle want to use these two attacks to paint a picture about the nature of the violent extremist threat facing this nation. Once again, the picture they draw is not likely to be accurate, nuanced or subtle. In the past, I have expressed my concerns about the nature and direction of these hearings.

My concerns are amplified today. Focusing on the followers of one religion as the only credible threat to this nation’s security is inaccurate, narrow, and blocks consideration of emerging threats.

Our military is open to all faiths. A congressional hearing that focuses on religion and the military is likely to harm unit cohesion and undermine morale within our military.

A congressional hearing that identifies one religion as a likely threat within the military is not only inaccurate but unwise. As a matter of practicality, I am certain that on the battlefield, how a soldier prays is probably less important than how well he or she shoots.

But practicalities aside, as we begin this hearing, I think it is appropriate to acknowledge and remember that today is the anniversary of the bombing of Pearl Harbor. That single event—an unprovoked attack on an American military installation in an American territory—propelled this country into World War II.

December 7, 1941, was a day that will live in infamy. The veterans of World War II fought to stop the spread of totalitarian rule, halt genocide and restore freedom. They risked their lives to defend this nation. The same can be said of today’s veterans. The men and women returning from Afghanistan and Iraq have placed their lives on the line. And each one volunteered to go.

So as we think about the significance of this day in history and the possible meaning of this hearing,

we must begin by thinking about what these two groups of soldiers fought for. Each of them answered the call to arms because they believe in America. Each fought because they believe this country is a beacon of hope and freedom in a troubled world. They are willing to shed their blood to protect and defend the rights and liberties guaranteed in the Constitution.

So, as we think about our debt to the veterans of past wars, let us not forget our most basic obligation to those who currently serve. We owe them a clear understanding of their mission and a clear definition of the enemy. Their enemy is not a religion. Their mission is not to defeat an ideology.

And while some of my colleagues appear to have difficulty grasping this, I am glad that the military people understand it. In the days after the Ft. Hood shootings, then Defense Secretary Gates refused to lay this tragedy at the feet of one man or one religion. He appointed a board and gave them the mission of reviewing what happened, why it happened, and what could be done to prevent the same thing from happening in the future.

The review board did not sweep this incident under the rug. They did not seek easy explanations and simple answers. They identified deficiencies in DOD programs and policies on force protection, emergency response procedures, and threat identification. And once they identified the problems, they began to solve them. To date, DOD has completed forty-three of the review board's recommendations. Fifteen additional recommendations should be completed by March 2012.

However, the military's ability to move forward and complete the remaining recommendations depends entirely on us. Since September 11th, Congress has approved a total of \$1.283 trillion for military operations, base security, reconstruction, foreign aid, embassy costs, and veterans' health care associated with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Budget cuts may prevent the implementation of the rest of these recommendations.

Today, I hope we can reach a bi-partisan, bi-cameral agreement that the military should have the funding it needs to prevent another tragedy like Fort Hood. If we can, then something good will have come out of this hearing."

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