

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****Hearing: A False Narrative Endangers the Homeland***

January 15, 2014 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the full Committee hearing entitled “A False Narrative Endangers the Homeland”:

“Today’s hearing seeks to examine whether U.S. policy to address unrest in the Middle East, the splintering of Al Qaeda, and the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan and Iraq, adversely affect homeland security in the United States. Such an examination must begin with an authoritative statement of this Administration’s policies and actions in each area.

However, because there is no witness from the Administration for us to question about these policies, it is unclear how this hearing will aid this Committee’s understanding of these critical issues or help inform our oversight of the policies necessary to impact this nation’s homeland security.

It appears that this hearing begins with the assumption that to maintain safety and security within its borders, this nation must use its military to address every threat outside of its shores. Given such a perspective, the United States would be in the position of constantly engaging in military action abroad.

After \$1.5 trillion dollars and 6,000 American lives lost, there are many in this country who want us to consider a viable exit strategy. There are also many people who believe that the safety of this nation can be secured by means that are tailored to each circumstance based on a realistic assessment of the threat.

As we consider the threat, we must acknowledge our current posture. Most experts agree that the death of Osama bin Laden has substantially weakened Al Qaeda. Its capabilities to mount large-scale attacks have been reduced.

However, Al Qaeda is more decentralized, more dependent on its affiliates and has come to rely on its ability to radicalize and recruit distant recruits to carry out attacks. The lack of a clear organizational and leadership structure has severely diminished the group’s ability to develop joint plans and wage large-scale attacks.

I am not advocating that America return to a pre-September 11th posture. I do not know anyone who would advocate such a position. However, we must plan based on the facts as they are—not the facts as they were.

As a legislative body, we must ask serious questions about what our homeland security policies and posture should be given the ongoing dismantling of Al Qaeda.

The Congressional Research Service has said that some of the questions we should ask involve the costs associated with continued U.S. military presence and the challenges of restoring the readiness of our forces.

We must discuss a strategy that protects U.S. interests as well as the integration of effort across U.S. government agencies in support of a broad U.S. political strategy.

As we consider our policies, we need to ask about the national security apparatus that has developed in this country.

The revelations about the massive collection of information and the operation of the FISA courts have caused people to question how these activities have improved our homeland security. I understand that the Administration will announce its plans to revamp the NSA surveillance programs. I look forward to hearing about those plans. This Committee needs to be a part of the discussion about the effect that these metadata collection programs have on our homeland security.

Mr. Chairman, I agree that we need to take a serious look at how world events play into our homeland security policies. This Congress must be willing to legislate and make changes in the laws that affect the homeland security of this nation.

However, before we legislate, we need to be willing to discuss the law and the underlying policies with all the relevant parties - the Congress and the Administration - in the room. I look forward to having that discussion. I also look forward to the Administration being invited here to testify about how their overseas policies will affect our homeland security.”

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