

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****Assessing Terrorism in the Caucasus and the Threat to the Homeland***

April 3, 2014 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for Counterterrorism and Intelligence subcommittee hearing entitled “Assessing Terrorism in the Caucasus and the Threat to the Homeland”:

“I would also like to thank the witnesses for testifying to further this Committee’s efforts to better understanding terrorist threats, their makeup, and the activities of extremists groups within the Caucasus region.

The Boston Marathon Bombing and the Sochi Olympics spurred a growing interest in the Caucasus region, and I commend the Subcommittee for exploring the topic. However, the Subcommittee must be cautious in its approach. There is an opinion that many within the Caucasus region have been radicalized into an extremist mentality of global war. Many want to suggest this was the mentality of Tamerlan Tsarnaev, brother of alleged co-conspirator Boston Marathon bomber Dzhokhar Tsarnaev.

Mr. Chairman, like I have reminded you that on several occasions throughout our years on this Committee, our words go beyond these four walls. We must remember that we have a responsibility to the people of Boston and the rest of the American public, not to create a defense for the capital case against Dzhokhar Tsarnaev. While others suggest that there is a possibility that Tamerlan Tsarnaev was inspired by extremist groups in the Caucasus region, I believe that speculation about any influence he may have received is not helpful to the prosecution.

Just last Friday, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev’s defense team filed motions based on a report by Committee staff. While I do not believe we need to jeopardize the prosecution of Dzhokhar Tsarnaev by speculating on Tamerlan’s dealings in the Caucasus region, I do believe it is necessary for us to understand not only which groups are becoming radicalized in the Caucasus region, but also, why this is happening. The Caucasus region continues to be plagued by poverty, high unemployment, and challenges in governance and stability.

Like in other regions, it is possible that these social problems are being exploited to boost recruitment. There is also evidence that suggests religious ideology plays only a limited role in the violence of extremist groups in the Caucasus region, but is used to mask the business of organized crime. According to reports, approximately one quarter of the violence in the North Caucasus is from organized crime. Mislabeling acts of organized crime as “terrorism” diminishes the real threats of terrorism in the region.

Moreover, since 2009, when Russia ended its counter-terrorism operation in Chechnya, there has been a surge in violence and security forces within the North Caucasus region. While it is unclear if violence in the region has created a need for more security forces, it is well-documented that the actions of these security forces - continuous engagement in a brutal and violent harassment and religious profiling - feeds a cycle of insurgency. It is clear that the instability of governance throughout the Caucasus region continues to prohibit religious freedoms and rights, which ultimately fuels al Qaeda, its affiliates, and other extremists groups. Ultimately, if we hope to gain a serious understanding of terrorists and extremist threats, we

must do a thorough examination.

Rather than viewing terrorists and insurgencies in an over-generalized way, I encourage all Members of this Committee to seek more information to understand the global and local dynamics fueling the insurgency in the Caucasus region.”

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