

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****Worldwide Threats to the Homeland***

September 17, 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 “Worldwide Threats to the Homeland”:

“We are fortunate to have an exceptionally accomplished and knowledgeable panel of witnesses to discuss the current threat picture. Secretary Johnson, welcome back. You have offered informative and useful testimony before, and I expect today to be no different. Director Comey, it is great to have the Bureau participate in today’s discussion. I believe this is the first time we had an FBI Director before the Committee to testify. Hopefully, Mr. Chairman, we will have other opportunities to invite him back. Director Olsen, I join the Chairman in commending you for 24 years of federal service and, in particular, your contributions as the Director of the National Counterterrorism Center. I wish you the best during your transition.

Thirteen years ago this week, just days after the horrific September 11th terrorist attacks, then-President George W. Bush addressed Congress and the Nation. In his address, President Bush stated, “our war on terror begins with Al Qaeda and it will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped, and defeated”. Thirteen years later, there have been some successes, particularly against core al Qaeda, but as we know, not all terrorist groups have been “found, stopped, and defeated”.

Those of us who were in the audience when President Bush delivered his address could not have predicted how the terrorist threat would evolve. At that time, Congress was completely focused on preventing another large-scale attack on U.S. soil. In 2001, we understood Al Qaeda to be a centralized organization. Little thought was given to the prospects that Al Qaeda would franchise terrorism and inspire satellite groups in the Arabian Peninsula and Africa.

The prospect that an attack would be carried out by a “lone wolf actor” with no direct training or support from Al Qaeda barely entered the discussion. We were thinking that terrorist groups were focused on taking human lives; we did not predict that in the decade after September 11th state actors or terrorist groups would try to devastate our economy and steal valuable intellectual property by targeting our cyber infrastructure.

Finally, we could not have imagined that on the eve of the 13th Anniversary of 9/11, another American President would come before the American people to make the case for defeating and destroying a terrorist organization. Indeed, the threat from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) is legitimate and warrants attention.

That said, the situation on the ground in Syria is fluid and complex, defeating and destroying ISIL in this context is no easy task. I cannot stress enough the need for vigilance and care, particularly should we decide to partner with individuals on the Syria to try and defeat ISIL. In addition to our efforts abroad, we need to remain vigilant and improve preparedness and resilience at home.

Last month’s arrest of Don Morgan illustrates my long-standing view that we must reject specific ethnic or religious profiles of “would be terrorist”. Violent extremism has no race, ethnicity, religion or culture and there is no single profile or pathway for individuals who come to embrace violent

extremism.

Also, since September 11th, state and local law enforcement have received grant funding from the Federal government to prepare for and prevent terrorist activity. We saw the value of this grant funding after the bombings at last year's Boston Marathon, as the police wore protective gear and stabilized the situation. More recently, there was an example of what I believe to be an improper use of Federal equipment and resources—in Ferguson, Missouri.

Better oversight and tighter control of how Federal homeland security and law enforcement resources are used by State and local partners is one area that needs to be improved. Another area that is a perennial challenge is information sharing with State and local law enforcement.

Even with fusion centers and joint terrorist task forces, thirteen years after September 11th, we still hear that information sharing can be improved. Given threats from ISIL, Al Qaeda, lone wolf actors, and other terrorist organizations, is there a way to an optimal relationship between federal state and local partners? The thirteen years since September 11th have shown us that we cannot have a myopic or narrow view of the terrorist threats we face. It is my hope that today we engage in a productive dialogue about the variety of threats to our Nation.”

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