

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****Countering Violent Islamist Extremism: The Urgent Threat of Foreign Fighters and Homegrown Terror***

February 11, 2015 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the full Committee hearing entitled “Countering Violent Islamist Extremism: The Urgent Threat of Foreign Fighters and Homegrown Terror”:

“I would like to welcome Director Rasmussen to his first appearance before this Committee as the Director of the National Counterterrorism Center. I also thank the rest of the panel for testifying about the Federal governments’ efforts to identify and deter foreign fighters and the governments’ efforts to counter violent extremism. I would like to express my condolences to the family of 26 year old Kayla Mueller, an American aid worker who was taken hostage by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. U.S. officials have confirmed she was killed by the terrorist group. Kayla Mueller’s death and other recent terrorist attacks across the world over the past few months have magnified the nature of the evolving threat from terrorist groups and state actors.

The heinous actions by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), including the beheading of a Japanese journalist and the terrorist group’s burning of a Jordanian pilot, further illustrate the abhorrent nature of this terrorist group. Last month, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff indicated that the radical ideology of ISIL is causing other terrorist groups to rebrand themselves and emulate ISIL. Top U.S. officials have made public statements that foreign fighters linked to ISIL may pose a direct threat to this country.

Moreover, those inspired by the ideology of ISIL, Al Qaeda, and other groups are of concern. As we look at these threats, we cannot take a myopic view. Each attack from terrorist groups have reemphasized the global reach of terrorist activity.

For instance, there was the crippling cyber attack in November on Sony Pictures Entertainment’s network. In December, in Sydney, Australia, we witnessed a terrorist attack on a cafe where, at the end of a 16-hour standoff, two innocent people laid dead. Then, in January, in Paris, there was a series of execution-style murders of 12 members of Charlie Hebdo’s creative team. Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula has taken credit for this attack.

This serves as a reminder that the terrorist threats we face are evolving quickly. This Committee’s responsibility is to hold hearings and receive classified information that lets us know the nature of the threat and how the federal government is dealing with the threat.

In spite of this, the Republican majority continues to play political games with funding the Department of Homeland Security. Mr. Chairman, I, too, feel that it is meaningless to have a strategy if the ends are not paired with the means to achieve them. It is my hope that you will make that point to your colleagues and leadership who are holding the funding for the key agency of the Federal government that Americans look to detect, deter, and respond to terrorism hostage. Unfortunately, the Department of Homeland Security is operating under the threat of a shutdown and is only funded by a continuing resolution for the next 17 days.

It is important that my Republican colleagues act responsibly, stop playing politics, and pass a clean

DHS funding bill. Without a fully-funded Department of Homeland Security, some of our key methods of identifying terrorists and preventing terrorist travel will be at risk. Are we really ready to stand before the American people - those who trust and value that we recognize their needs - and declare for the sake of partisanship, we are going to make our nation more vulnerable by not funding DHS?"

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