

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****A Global Battleground: The Fight Against Islamist Extremism at Home and Abroad***

March 24, 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 “A Global Battleground: The Fight Against Islamist Extremism at Home and Abroad”:

“Over the weekend, the United States pulled its remaining personnel out of Yemen due to a dire security situation in that country. There have been some who have criticized the decision to pull out of Yemen claiming that pulling out of Yemen in the interest of security puts our foreign intelligence at risk. I want to learn from General Hayden when it is appropriate to leave our public servants in a dangerous situation in the interest of gathering more intelligence.

This hearing is the latest in a series of Committee activities related to combating ideological extremism. Last month, the Chairman and I announced a bi-partisan task force on the threat from foreign fighters. That task force commenced its work on March 2nd.

In last month’s Full Committee hearing on the threat from foreign fighters, the Director of the National Counterterrorism Center, Nicholas Rasmussen, stated that more work remains to ensure that our foreign partners are willing and able to identify and stop foreign fighters at their borders. I look forward to the task force’s recommendations. Also, the Committee Democrats have also asked the Government Accountability Office to look into the Obama Administration’s Counter Violent Extremism Strategy.

Further, it is my understanding that the Majority Staff is doing an examination of the strategy. As we continue to examine the threat from homegrown terrorism, it is my hope that in the future we hold a hearing to learn from the Administration how its strategy, “Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism”, will be helpful. While I understand that the White House held a summit last month on violent extremism, this strategy has been in place since 2011. It is past time that Members hear from the Administration on this topic.

Threats from foreign and domestic terrorist groups are not going away overnight. For years, we have seen how terrorist groups use the Internet and social media to recruit new members and spread their ideology. It is not surprising that social media is being used to espouse messages of fear and terror; to cultivate extreme viewpoints; and to inspire terrorists. These outlets are inexpensive and far-reaching, enabling any extremist group to take advantage of them.

A quick search of the Internet can produce content from extremists of all stripes—from Neo Nazis to ISIL sympathizers to those who have pledged allegiance to Al Qaeda. Last month, Director Rasmussen also stated that ISIL’s exploitation of social media played a prominent role in the group’s ability to recruit fighters from around the world. As we find ways to counter the terrorist’s messages at home, we do not focus on one specific ethnic, age, religious or gender group.

The range of indictments and prosecutions from the Department of Justice –from last week’s indictment of a 47 year old Air Force veteran to the indictment of a 21-year-old man from Southern California to the sentencing of a 19-year-old girl from Colorado to sentencing of a 44 -year-old man from North Carolina - illustrates that the number of Americans seeking association with ISIL is

diverse. None of the people that the Department of Justice has charged with providing material support to ISIL has been charged with plotting an attack in the United States.

An unfortunate reality we know all too well, but do not want to face, is a successful lone wolf attack inspired by a terrorist group on American soil. I want to build upon the work that we are already doing and encourage this Committee to continue the serious discussions on ways to counter-message while protecting innovation and constitutional rights. As we consider this real threat, we also need to understand how we may use social media to diffuse rather than incite.”

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