



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)
*Stopping the Next Attack: How to Keep Our City Streets from
Becoming the Battleground***

September 21, 2016

In light of the recent terrorist attacks in Minnesota, New Jersey and New York, I would like to offer my sympathies to the victims and their families. I believe we all agree that terrorism and other violence on our streets is an all-too-common occurrence. We must act more boldly to stem this tide.

In just the past four months, incidents in Orlando, Dallas, Minnesota, New York and New Jersey have brought into sharp focus the complex, diverse, and confounding nature of the "lone wolf" threat. Those who are inspired to carry out such attacks do not neatly fit a single profile or espouse a single hateful or violent extremist ideology. We saw this scenario in the Orlando attack where the perpetrator espoused several conflicting ideologies and seemingly was not a part of a terrorist cell.

Just this past Saturday, a lone actor, who is being investigated for possible ties to ISIL, attacked 10 people at a mall in Minnesota. Also last weekend, in New Jersey and New York, it is believed that the suspected bomber, who also shot two police officers, may have been inspired by Al Qaeda and right now appears to have acted alone.

In July, a perpetrator who had no formal affiliation with any particular group but may have been inspired by a black separatist group, shot and killed five police officers in Dallas.

We know by now that our law enforcement is a target for terrorists. We also know that law enforcement's job is made more difficult by the availability of assault weapons. Earlier this month, one of our subcommittees received testimony from representatives of local law enforcement identifying the availability of guns and the lone wolf threat as serious problems for police.

In fact, I would note that one of our witnesses today, Chief Acevedo, has gone further in describing this challenge by stating that "the widespread availability of guns in this country makes it possible for potentially dangerous persons to legally acquire weapons to cause mayhem and colossal casualties".

Chief Acevedo goes on to state "whether it's ISIS abroad or home-grown extremists,

the threat exists and haunts police chiefs every day". I look forward to engaging Chief Acevedo on this point.

Even the terrorists know that it is far easier to carry out an attack in the name of their ideology on U.S. soil with a gun than in Europe. A testimonial by one former member of ISIL published this summer underscores this point.

The former terrorist explained ISIL's view on terrorist recruitment in the U.S. as follows: "For America..., it is easier to get them over the social network because the Americans are dumb—they have open gun policies." "...[W]e can radicalize them easily and if they have no prior records they can buy guns...we don't need a contact man to provide guns for them."

We have seen the scenario the former ISIL member mentioned unfold with assault rifles here in this country. We saw it in San Bernardino where perpetrators inspired by ISIL walked into a soft target and killed 14 people and injured another 22 people with an assault-style weapon. Tragically, we saw it again this June in Orlando when a perpetrator walked into a nightclub and killed 49 people with an assault weapon.

Our witness, the Sheriff of Orange County, immediately recognized the impact that assault weapons were having on our homeland security. As Sheriff Demings said in the aftermath of the shooting, "we have to look at some of our gun laws and make a determination of what we stand for and just how prevalent some of these 'assault rifles' are available today. Otherwise, if we don't make some modification, we are going to continue seeing some of what you see happening in now here in [Orlando]..."

Mr. Chairman, I agree with you that radicalization and recruitment are a problem. But after 9/11, this nation made a vow not to give into terrorism.

Therefore, I will not concede that our city streets - the places where our constituents live, work, and play - are at risk of becoming battlegrounds like Syria and Afghanistan. As lawmakers, we must make it more difficult for terrorists to carry out attacks on U.S. soil.

Taking action to prevent terrorists from having access to assault weapons would be a good start. However, it seems that in the waning days of this Congress, there is more appetite for advancing un-American and counter-productive proposals such as closing the borders to Muslims or ethnically profiling whole communities.

Secretary Jeh Johnson, testifying before this Committee, noted that with the current threat picture, homeland security cannot be achieved without sensible gun control laws. It is time for us to rethink how we prevent terrorism.

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