

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****Terrorism Gone Viral: Garland, Texas and Beyond***

June 3, 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 “Terrorism Gone Viral: Garland, Texas and Beyond”:

“On May 3, the American Freedom Defense Initiative, which is recognized as a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center, organized the “Muhammad Art Exhibit and Contest” event in Garland, Texas. Two violent extremists, armed with assault rifles and body armor, attacked police that were providing security to the event, resulting in the wounding of a dedicated police officer. According to the FBI, just hours before the Garland attack, a bulletin was issued to state and local police stating that one of the assailants may have had an interest in traveling to the event.

Unfortunately, the local police stated that the bulletin was not received in time. By no means am I saying that this bulletin would have changed the outcome of the situation, but I do think that this illustrates that we need to continue looking into information sharing with the state and local police and also listening to the boots on the ground on how to recognize and prevent acts of homegrown violent extremism.

In the days following the attack in Garland, supporters of the terrorist group ISIL praised the attack. After the attack, it was discovered that one of the gunmen detailed his plans to leave the country and travel to Syria to join ISIL on Twitter. The assailant’s plans were disrupted when the FBI arrested some people that planned to travel with him. It also came to light that he engaged with other ISIL followers from around the world through Twitter.

We know that the threats from foreign and domestic terrorist groups are not going away overnight. Using the Internet and social media to recruit members, plan attacks, and spread ideology is not novel. As the Director of the National Counterterrorism Center pointed out in a hearing in this Committee in February, ISIL’s exploitation of social media plays “a prominent role” in the group’s ability to recruit fighters from around the world.

But as we look at social media and how violent, extremist propaganda is spread, we must look at ways to counter-message. Both sides of the aisle are engaged in an examination of the President’s Countering Violent Extremism strategy. The Department has a vital role to play in carrying out that strategy, as evidenced by the fact that there is a dedicated CVE coordinator, David Gersten.

At this time, I would request that this Committee to have an open oversight hearing where we can take testimony from the DHS CVE coordinator about the Department’s role in implementing the CVE strategy. Furthermore, we know that more work remains to ensure that our foreign partners are willing and able to stop and identify foreign fighters at their borders.

Last Friday, the UN Security Council issued an unprecedented statement urging countries to enforce border controls that allow suspected terrorists to travel across international borders. The Director of the NCTC also stated at our February hearing that there was work to be done in this area. I know that the Committee has a Task Force that is examining this issue, and we should be receiving their recommendations soon.

As I stated at our last hearing on this issue, we all have a stake prevent terrorist attacks against Americans and on American soil. Accordingly, I encourage this Committee to continue serious discussions on how to counter violent extremist messages, while protecting Constitutional rights. As we consider this threat, we need to foster greater information sharing among diverse partners and seeks new ways to work together to pursue effective and promising approaches to counter violent extremism.”

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