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Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)

ISIS Post-Caliphate: Threat Implications for America and the West

May 23, 2018

Today, the Committee is meeting to examine the threat posed by ISIS to America and the West. While ISIS has suffered significant losses in the wake of attacks by U.S.-led coalition forces under both the prior Administration and the current one, the so-called caliphate is not yet gone.

Indeed, even as ISIS has lost territory, funding, and fighters, its threat to the U.S. and our allies persists, albeit in new forms. As the so-called "caliphate" has shrunk, you and I both know ISIS has turned to the virtual space and its affiliates and followers to recruit and radicalize new members around the world.

Rather than planning or directing sophisticated attacks carried out by individuals traveling from overseas, ISIS can inspire lone wolves right here at home online with few resources and relatively little effort. This more disbursed, asymmetrical threat will be harder for the U.S. and our allies to combat.

It is essential for the Trump Administration to ensure a careful, coordinated effort among all elements of our national security apparatus – military and intelligence assets, diplomats working with foreign partners, and homeland security officials at home. It remains to be seen whether this Administration is up to the task.

As Members of Congress and Members of the Committee on Homeland Security, our role will be to conduct close oversight of the Trump Administration's efforts. This is a critical juncture, as the remnants of ISIS on the ground attempt to regroup and determine the future trajectory of the organization.

As we have witnessed before, these groups do not disappear but often morph into a new entity that poses new threats.

Unfortunately, as the virtual space becomes increasingly important to ISIS, the organization's existing efforts to recruit and radicalize followers are only furthered by the Trump Administration's rhetoric and policies. President Trump's own hateful words about Islam and Muslims lend credence to ISIS' message about the West.

This kind of rhetoric also undermines our relationship with key partners abroad, jeopardizing essential information sharing relationships.

At the same time, the President's comments stoke fear and division among the American people, which is exactly the goal of terrorist organizations like ISIS. If President Trump's rhetoric has been harmful in this regard, his policies have been worse.

From the Muslim travel bans to the Trump Administration's almost exclusive focus on Islamic groups in its counterterrorism efforts, his policies have actually made us less safe. Today, I hope to hear from our witnesses about the future of ISIS and how the United States can best counter its threat to the homeland, both now and in the future, while upholding our American values.

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