

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****Worldwide Threats to the Homeland: ISIS and the New Wave of Terror***

July 14, 2016 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the full Committee hearing entitled “Worldwide Threats to the Homeland: ISIS and the New Wave of Terror”

“Unfortunately, today, the Nation finds itself in a period of heated rhetoric—fueled by fear. Today, Americans legitimately fear infiltration by the violent ideology espoused by ISIL. Last month’s horrific terrorist attack in Orlando, Florida, underscores that ISIL’s violent ideology is reaching Americans and inspiring terrorism.

Without training, direction, or support by a foreign terrorist organization, the Orlando assailant, armed with an AR-type rifle and 9mm semi-automatic pistol, carried out the deadliest shooting in American history.

During the attack, the shooter pledged allegiance to ISIL but prior to the attack, he historically-aligned himself with competing foreign terrorist organizations. Soon after, evidence emerged that the shooter may have also been motivated by racism and homophobia. Yet, in the hours and days post-Orlando, Members of this body and the Executive Branch wasted no time labeling this tragedy as an “act of terrorism”.

In contrast, last summer, when a gunman, who, like the Orlando shooter was radicalized online, opened fire on nine parishioners in a Charleston, South Carolina, many in this body and, indeed, the Executive Branch, refused to label this attack an “act of terrorism”.

Last week, a gunman who we understand, through his online activities, ascribed to a violent political ideology that runs counter to American values, ambushed police officers in Dallas, Texas, at a peaceful protest to send a political message.

Yet, many of the same people in this body and the Administration who labeled past mass shootings that were inspired by foreign terrorist organizations as “acts of terrorism,” were quick to dismiss the notion that the Dallas attack was an act of terrorism.

While foreign terrorist organizations like ISIL represent a significant homeland security threat, today’s threat environment is far more diverse than back in 1949, when this room was used to investigate the threat posed by one ideology—communism.

Those who single-mindedly focus on one ideology or group - namely “ISIL” - run the risk of leaving us vulnerable to attacks by other foreign terrorist organizations like al Qaeda and even by domestic terrorist groups.

To underscore the domestic terrorism threat, I would note that earlier this year, anti-government extremists took over a Federal facility in Oregon, threatening the security of Federal government employees for 41 days. Law enforcement officers consistently rank the threat from anti-government groups higher than the threat from foreign terrorist organizations.

Still, the same voices that were so quick to label incidents in Orlando and San Bernardino “acts of

terrorism” have largely been silent about the heightened threat environment associated with anti-government groups.

To today’s witnesses, you may be chided by my Republican colleagues for the fact that, in your written testimony the phrase “radical Islamist terrorism” is not used. However, fixation on that phrase is misplaced, insofar as the threat posed by ISIL and other foreign terrorist organizations receives significant attention in the testimony.

More troubling, is the fact that nowhere in your testimonies is there even a passing mention of domestic terrorism or anti-government groups. Terrorist-inspired lone wolf or small cell attacks can be inspired by foreign and domestic actors.

To respond to this new wave of terror, inspired mainly by propaganda on the Internet, the Administration is pursuing programs to counter violent extremism. Putting aside the fact that there is some debate on the effectiveness of such programs, I have questions about whether the agencies charged to carry out the Administration’s CVE efforts are working to prevent terrorist recruitment and radicalization by all types of terrorist groups.

I am troubled that the Department of Homeland Security recently announced \$10 million in CVE grant funding but has yet to issue the Department-wide strategy which I have been requesting for over a year and have consistently been told is “forthcoming”.

Beyond the discussion of CVE, I look forward to engaging the witnesses on an issue common to the attacks in Orlando, San Bernardino, Charleston, and Dallas—the availability of assault weapons to terrorists.

We must be able to keep guns out of the hands of terrorists. Members of Congress, the Administration, and the American public recognize this. However, Speaker Ryan and Republican leadership continue to approve empty gestures posing as legislation instead of bringing up a vote on sensible gun control.

We know that the common thread between the most recent attacks – both inspired by foreign and domestic actors - on American soil had two commonalities: radicalization and assault weapons. I do not accept the notion that nothing can be done to address the availability of military-style firearms to individuals with intent to do harm to our country. When it comes to protecting this nation, Congress will be rightfully judged by the American people on whether it tackles both.”

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