



COMMITTEE ON
**HOMELAND
SECURITY**
DEMOCRATS

Rep. Bennie G. Thompson, *Ranking member*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)
The Terrorist Diaspora: After the Fall of the Caliphate
Task Force on Denying Terrorists Entry into the United States

July 13, 2017

This Committee has a long history of addressing terrorist travel to the United States through its oversight and legislative work. Today's task force hearing will address a topic that has been addressed by a previous Committee task force and Subcommittees.

The rising number of foreign fighters returning from Iraq and Syria to Europe, along with increased terrorist attacks in Europe, raises concern about the possibility of foreign fighters from Europe or elsewhere seeking to enter this country to do us harm.

Identifying foreign fighters among the millions of legitimate travelers to the U.S. each year is a serious challenge for the Department of Homeland Security and other Federal agencies.

Individuals have become more sophisticated about traveling to the so-called caliphate undetected. Many of our foreign partners have limited ability to track their returnees and information sharing can be a challenge. It is therefore incumbent upon the U.S. to continue to enhance our capacity to identify those who have traveled to Iraq and Syria for terrorist purposes and support our partners' capacity to do the same.

It is also imperative that we strengthen information sharing agreements and practices with foreign governments to ensure that they are providing information about their returnees who may pose a threat to the U.S. This effort requires diplomacy and relationship building, neither of which have been a strong suit of the Trump Administration thus far. Oftentimes, putting "America first" means working with foreign partners rather than alienating them.

I know the operators at DHS and other Federal agencies have forged good working relationships with their foreign counterparts. Perhaps the Administration at its highest level could take a lesson from them.

I would also note that seven months into the Trump presidency, the Department of Homeland Security still has numerous vacancies in critical leadership positions, including those integral to addressing the foreign fighter threat, including Commissioner of Customs and Border Protection and Director of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Under Secretary for Intelligence and Analysis, and Assistant Secretary for the Office of Policy.

"Acting" agency heads may be career officials with substantial expertise, but they are

generally not empowered to implement new policies and initiatives. The White House needs to ensure the Department has confirmed leadership in place to deal with emerging and evolving threats like the matter before the Task Force this afternoon.

#

Media contact: Adam Comis at (202) 225-9978

