

Statement of Ranking Member Bonnie Watson Coleman
Task Force on Denying Terrorists Entry into the United States
“The Terrorist Diaspora: After the Fall of the Caliphate”

July 13, 2017

Tens of thousands of foreign fighters from countries around the globe have traveled to Iraq and Syria to engage in the fight on behalf of ISIS. The vast majority of these individuals are thought to be from Europe, with a far smaller number coming from the U.S. Over time, many of these fighters have begun to return home, raising concerns about the security threat they may pose both to their native countries and nations abroad.

On this Task Force, we are charged with examining the potential threat foreign fighters and other terrorists may pose to the U.S. in particular. Specifically, we are focused on how our government can identify foreign fighters who may seek to travel to this country to do us harm and deny them entry.

This is no easy task, to be sure. Travel to and from the so-called caliphate is generally clandestine, and many countries lack either the capacity to collect information on their returning citizens or the will to share it with our government.

Given this challenge, I strongly agree with the testimony of our witness, Dr. Clarke, that our first priority in addressing the foreign fighter threat should be detection. We must identify returning foreign fighters so we can determine which have the intent and means to travel to the U.S. to carry out an attack and focus our efforts to deny them entry to this country.

That, in turn, requires increasing information sharing with partner nations and enhancing their capacity to screen potential terrorists. This initiative must be done cooperatively, recognizing the sovereignty of other nations and their varying laws and technological capacity, while underscoring our shared interest in this important goal.

Unfortunately, I am concerned that the Trump Administration’s travel ban and rhetoric about Muslims as well as alienation of our friends in Europe is counterproductive to the kind of multilateral cooperation that is necessary. I hope we can overcome these unfortunate actions to work cooperatively in the interest of the security of America.

Today, I look forward to hearing the assessment of our witness panel about what our government is currently doing to address the threat of returning foreign fighters to the homeland, and what more can and should be done.

Of course, addressing the potential threat posed by returning foreign fighters is just one part of securing the homeland. But as events continue to unfold in Syria and more fighters return home, coinciding with increased attacks in Europe, we must ensure we are doing all we can to secure our Nation from this threat.

I know the Members of this Task Force are deeply committed to doing our part in that effort, on a bipartisan basis, and I am pleased to be a part of it.