

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Bonnie Watson Coleman (D-NJ)

Subcommittee on Oversight and Management Efficiency

“Identifying the Enemy: Radical Islamist Terror”

Thursday, September 22, 2016

Last week, we honored those who lost their lives on September 11, 2001. Fifteen years after these horrific attacks, we recognize that the terrorist threat to the United States has evolved.

No longer do terrorists have to travel overseas for training or be directed by a leader of a terrorist organization in order to cause harm to the United States.

As we have seen from the terrorist attacks in Orlando and in Charleston, and quite possibly the attacks in Minnesota and New York, terrorist attacks in the United States can be lone actors, inspired by a particular ideology. This ideology can be espoused on the Internet or in public forums.

Additionally, propaganda including political discussions—such as the name of this hearing-- that provide a misnomer to the threat also add to the rhetoric that can inspire a lone actor. Inflammatory rhetoric such as the suggestion that the United States should ban or surveil certain populations also fuel terrorist groups.

I caution those with public platforms to be more mindful when addressing the threat. This is not a matter of being politically correct. This is recognizing that our words resonate beyond these four walls.

The words we say reach terrorists—both foreign and domestic inspired. Even though we have complicated the situation by debating about labels, the federal government, including the Department of Homeland Security, has renewed its focus on countering violent extremism.

While the Administration states that countering violent extremism is a whole of government approach, DHS is seemingly a federal government leader for countering violent extremism.

Our witness today is the chair of the countering violent extremism task force. Also, last year, DHS created the Office for Community Partnerships and recently established the Fiscal Year 2016 CVE grant program. These programs were designed to develop and expand efforts to counter violent extremist activity.

However, while Congress has appropriated funds for these efforts, there has been no CVE strategy issued by the Department and there has been no implementation plan of this strategy submitted to Congress.

I look forward to hearing from you, Mr. Selim, a specific CVE strategy that will be implemented and I look forward to you resolving the lack of transparency behind the Department’s CVE programs.

Protecting the American people from terrorist threats is the reason the Department of Homeland Security was created. Therefore, it is imperative that the Department and Congress look at the threat picture as a whole.

I look forward to hearing from today’s witnesses informed perspectives on the threat this country is facing and the ways in which not only DHS, but also the federal government as a whole, can counter violent extremism.