

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****Terrorism in Africa: The Imminent Threat to the United States***

April 29, 2015 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Counterterrorism and Intelligence Subcommittee hearing entitled “Terrorism in Africa: The Imminent Threat to the United States”:

“Over the past five years, democracy and progress have been marching forward in Africa and the Middle East. These strides have made life more difficult for terrorist groups. The United States continues to engage in military and civilian efforts to counter violent extremism in Africa. While most of our military efforts have eliminated senior leadership within terrorist organizations, these missions have also killed civilians.

Perfection is not possible, but we must continue to ensure that our missions remain targeted and properly executed. As our interests and military actions become almost exclusively focused on the recent gains of the Islamic State, I would encourage my colleagues to remember that other terrorist groups remain active.

Prior to the Charlie Hebdo attacks in Paris earlier this year, Al Qaeda’s operations appeared to have been diminished. However, it seems that now, perhaps in response to our growing interest in the Islamic State, Al Qaeda is intent on reminding us that it remains a threat to the United States. Today, we will hear testimony to confirm that while the methods may be different, the end-game for the groups within Africa is the same, whether they remain independent or pledge allegiance to a more established terrorist organization.

For example, Boko Haram has now pledged its allegiance to the Islamic State. Boko Haram is responsible for killing over 11,000 people, including more than 5,000 this year alone. Until recently, the outgoing President of Nigeria did not seem equipped or ready to effectively fight Boko Haram. Boko Haram’s focus on targeting women and children, including the kidnapping of over 200 school girls last April, garnered international attention and spawned the social media campaign “Bring Back Our Girls.”

Yesterday, after a full year of military and civilian pressure from Nigerian officials and international partners, including the United States, 200 girls were rescued from a Boko Haram camp by the Nigerian army. We do not know for sure if these are the same girls that were kidnapped last April, but we do know that Boko Haram forcibly uses women and girls as sex slaves and fighters. The rescue of these girls is nothing short of miraculous, but more needs to be done to diminish the capabilities of Boko Haram. I am hopeful that with Nigeria’s change in leadership and international cooperation, substantive strides can be made against Boko Haram.

No matter where these terrorist groups are located, all of them remain united in their goals to cause devastation in the United States and abroad. In order for us to wage an effective assault against the Islamic State and Al Qaeda, it is important for us to review what has worked in the past.

However, I would again warn that hearings like this may incite panic among the public without immediate and imminent threats. As capabilities diminish in groups like Al Qaeda and the Islamic State, they will begin to use our fears as their propaganda. I want to be clear. I am not advocating ignoring credible threats and standing in the face of danger. Credible threats cannot be ignored. But what also cannot be ignored are the costs of terrorism and terrorist threats. The methods currently used to decrease the reach and presence of terrorist organizations have limits that must be exercised when there is no credible and actionable intelligence.”

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