



OPENING STATEMENT

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MEDIA CONTACTS

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**Statement of Chairman Michael McCaul (R-TX)
House Homeland Security Committee**

Markup of 6 Foreign Fighter Task Force and 2 Homeland Security Bills

Remarks as Prepared

Almost a year ago, this Committee formed a bipartisan task force to look at the rising terrorist and foreign fighter threat. Their mandate was to identify security gaps and provide recommendations, especially to keep terrorists from infiltrating our country.

This past September, the task force issued its final report, which I was happy to release with Ranking Member Thompson and which we submitted to the President.

I would like to commend all that participated in the task force—and for the Republican side, its leader Mr. Katko, as well as Mr. Loudermilk, Mr. Ratcliffe, Mr. Hurd, and Ms. McSally.

That report contained more than 50 recommendations to protect the homeland. And their review ended up being the widest examination of our defenses against terrorist travel since the 9/11 Commission.

The task force concluded that despite concerted efforts to stem the flow, we have largely failed to stop Americans from traveling overseas to join jihadists.

This is deeply troubling. U.S. citizens lured to terrorist safe havens represent a triple threat. They strengthen extremist groups on the ground, become their leading recruiters and plotters, and can return home to conduct acts of terror.

The Task Force also found gaping security weaknesses overseas—especially in Europe—which make it easier for individuals to migrate to terrorist hotspots and eventually return home.

Sadly, in the months since the report was released, we have seen many of its dire warnings come to fruition. In fact, ISIS' global terror campaign in 2015 resulted in the deadliest Islamist terror attacks in America since 9/11 and in Europe since 2004.

But this Committee will not stand on the sidelines while the terror threat surges. We have acted legislatively in some form on nearly half of the task force recommendations—including those we will consider today. Several of these recommendations were signed into law in December, enhancing the

security of the Visa Waiver Program. I have no doubt these new measures will result in the interception of terror suspects and will keep dangerous individuals from reaching our country.

But I do have serious concerns that the President is not faithfully implementing this law. He has decided to interpret it in a way that weakens certain provisions in order to appease state sponsors of terror like Iran. This is unacceptable, and we will work with House leaders to hold the White House responsible for violating the spirit of the law and potentially putting our nation at risk.

Today, though, we have more opportunities to strengthen our security. Six of the eight bills we are marking up are products of the task force.

Among other measures, these bipartisan bills require the President to produce a National Strategy to Combat Terrorist Travel—and to act on it...to conduct a full-scale review of attempts by Americans to join jihadists in Syria and Iraq...to enhance state and local efforts to identify terror threats...and to quickly deploy innovative screening tools to help our allies catch terrorists.

And in the coming months, we will turn more of the task force's ideas into meaningful legislation. I again thank Ranking Member Thompson for his efforts and hope to continue working in bipartisan fashion.

I have stated before – we are at war. Our own city streets have become the front lines, which is why I urge my colleagues to act decisively on the legislation before us.

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