



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

*Crisis of Confidence: Preventing Terrorist Infiltration through U.S. Refugee & Visa Programs*

Remarks as Prepared

We are in the highest threat environment since 9/11. Yet there is a crisis of confidence in Washington's ability to do what it takes to protect our country.

The past few weeks, I have traveled around the country to discuss the terror threats we face and how to thwart them. The American people are concerned, and rightfully so.

The President believes terrorist groups like ISIS are on the run. But the truth is that they are on the march—and gaining ground across the world. Make no mistake: they want to send their foot soldiers to our shores.

That is why we are here today. We must be clear-eyed about our enemies' goals and do what it takes to prevent them from exporting their violence to America.

This morning our focus is on our nation's refugee and visa programs. Terrorists have used these routes to get into our country, exposing security vulnerabilities in our systems.

Just last month, the FBI arrested two Iraqis in the United States on terror-related charges. Both were inspired by ISIS, one had traveled to Syria, and both had entered our country as refugees.

In December, two ISIS fanatics in San Bernardino launched a heinous attack that left 14 dead and 22 wounded. One of these terrorists came into the United States—already radicalized—on a fiancé visa.

Jihadists see these programs as a backdoor into America and will continue to exploit them until we take action. ISIS has vowed to send its operatives into the West posing as refugees—and it has done so to brutally murder civilians on the streets of Paris.

Our intelligence community has also told me that individuals with terrorism ties in Syria have already tried to gain access to our country through the refugee program. What's even more concerning is that top officials have testified before this Committee that intelligence gaps prevent us from being able to confidently weed out terrorists from these groups.

This is why I drafted the SAFE Act, which passed the House with a bipartisan, veto-proof majority last year. It would add additional layers of security to the process of admitting refugees from the conflict zone. Sadly, the White House has chosen to let partisan politics get in the way of national security and pushed for this bill to be blocked in the Senate.

Without these enhanced protections in place, more violent extremists will be able to slip through the cracks, undetected.

Our visa programs are an even bigger concern.

On the chart behind me, you can see that terrorists have used student visas, tourist visas, and more to infiltrate our country and plot significant acts of terror. But time and again, we have failed to close the vulnerabilities in the system quickly enough.

Every one of the 9/11 hijackers came into America on a visa, and we failed to connect the dots to stop them. Several even overstayed their visas and nothing was done.

We saw this again in 2012, when the FBI arrested a Moroccan national plotting a suicide bombing right here on Capitol Hill. The suspect entered our country on a tourist visa in 1999...and he never left.

In a report to Congress issued last month, DHS admitted that there are hundreds of thousands—if not millions—of aliens in this country. These individuals came in legally but did not leave when they were supposed to.

This is why we must fulfill one of the last remaining recommendations of the 9/11 Commission by moving forward with a biometric entry-exit system to track those who overstay their welcome.

And we are currently working on legislation to close other glaring gaps in the system—and to bring visa security screening into the 21st Century by incorporating social media data into screening.

More broadly speaking, this Committee has led the effort in Congress to shut down terrorist pathways into our country. Our bipartisan Task Force on Combating Terrorist and Foreign Fighter Travel, led by the Gentleman from New York, Mr. Katko, made more than 50 actionable recommendations to improve our defenses.

I am proud to say that as of yesterday, we have taken legislative action to implement nearly half of them.

This includes a major security overhaul of the Visa Waiver Program through an effort spearheaded by this Committee's Vice Chair, Ms. Miller. However, we are deeply concerned that despite signing this law, the President does not plan to implement it faithfully. This failure of implementation is not the topic of today's hearing, the committee will convene one week from today to question witnesses from DHS and the State Department on their inaction.

Let us not forget: we are engaged in a war against Islamist terror. Americans expect us to act like it—and to do what it takes to respond to the evolving threat and secure our homeland.

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