



HOMELAND SECURITY COMMITTEE

Statement of Chairman Michael McCaul (R-TX) Task Force on Denying Terrorists Entry to the United States

“Denying Terrorists Entry to the United States: Examining Visa Security”
May 3, 2017

Remarks as Prepared

In June 2000, three of the 9/11 hijackers flew from European cities to Newark International Airport and were admitted into the United States. Their names were Mohamed Atta, Marwan al Shehhi, and Ziad Jarrah. Sadly, we know the rest of the story.

In the years following the 9/11 attacks, the United States government went to great lengths to identify gaps in our vetting systems and in how our agencies share intelligence. The Department of Homeland Security was created by the Bush administration and Congress to help protect America from terrorists by “connecting the dots.”

Now we face a new and growing threat to the homeland. In his speech on April 18, Secretary Kelly described us as a “nation under attack” facing the highest terror threat level in years. Due to our brave service men and women, ISIS and al Qaeda have incurred great losses in Syria and Iraq. Yet as the territory under their control shrinks, we are seeing an exodus of foreign fighters returning to their homelands, 10,000 of which are in Europe.

Our Committee has taken a serious look at foreign fighters. Last Congress, we pulled together a bipartisan Task Force to examine the threat posed to the United States by foreign fighters—especially those traveling in and out of Europe.

Through this extensive, six-month review, the Task Force produced more than 50 actionable recommendations to safeguard the homeland, and this Committee and the House passed legislation to address those recommendations. Those which became law include the Foreign Fighter Travel Review Act, which requires the President to review all Americans who have traveled to Iraq and Syria to join a foreign terrorist organization, and the National Strategy to Combat Terrorist Travel Act, which requires the Administration to develop a substantive strategy to combat the threat posed by extremists and prevent them from entering our country undetected.

Significantly, the Visa Waiver Program Improvement and Terrorist Travel Prevention Act of 2015 ramped up the security of the Visa Waiver Program by improved intelligence information sharing through HSPD-6 agreements and keeps terrorists from entering the United States undetected. It also includes major provisions that will make it harder for terror suspects to cross borders, including enhanced counterterrorism screening of travelers and measures to crack down on passport fraud.

This new Task Force will pick up where the last one left off: addressing the readiness of the homeland in light of the foreign fighter exodus. I was excited to name Congressman Mike Gallagher of Wisconsin as the chair of this initiative. As a former combat veteran and Middle East issue expert, I know he will tackle these urgent issues with seriousness and dedication. Together with the other seven members of this bipartisan Task Force, I know this will be equally productive and essential for America's security.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today on the important work performed by DHS and the State Department to prevent terrorists from gaining access to our Homeland.

I yield back the balance of my time.

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