

FINAL REPORT OF THE TASK FORCE ON DENYING TERRORISTS ENTRY INTO THE UNITED STATES

Background

- In February 2017, the House Homeland Security Committee established the Task Force on Denying Terrorists Entry into the United States, charged with examining how terrorists might infiltrate the homeland; identifying challenges with current U.S. government information sharing and vetting procedures; and reviewing the screening agencies' structure and bureaucracy.
- Task Force Members and staff conducted dozens of official meetings, hearings, briefings, and site visits in the United States and overseas as part of the review.
- The Task Force identified seven challenges, with associated recommendations, to better secure America from terrorist infiltration.

The Threat

- Roughly 40,000 foreign fighters—including around 5,000 Europeans—have traveled to Iraq and Syria to join groups like ISIS.
- With the loss of terrorist safe havens in Iraq and Syria, many of these fighters have traveled back to the West equipped with the knowledge and battlefield experience necessary to conduct successful terrorist attacks.
- European counterterrorism challenges and the alarming number of recent attacks, coupled with the large number of their foreign fighters—the majority of whom come from Visa Waiver Program countries—underscores the seriousness of the threat to the homeland from across the Atlantic Ocean.
- It is also important to note groups like ISIS violate the United States and the West's digital borders on a daily basis, using cyberspace to inspire, radicalize, and recruit followers, and provide guidance and instructions for carrying out attacks.

Results of the Review

As foreign fighters move between the conflict zone and the West, a whole-of-government information sharing effort is required, to keep tabs on those who may pose a threat to the homeland.

- Though much progress has been made since 9/11, there are bureaucratic, legal, capacity and technical challenges that hinder U.S. information sharing and related efforts.
- Congress and the Executive Branch must continue to work together to provide the resources and direction needed to overcome these challenges.
- The U.S. government should continue its use of multiagency task forces and agency embeds, which help promote information sharing between federal entities.
- Given the growth in the screening and vetting bureaucracy since 9/11, a review should be conducted to ensure all the entities involved are executing their responsibilities and there is no unnecessary duplication or stove-piping that limits information sharing.

DHS and the State Department must have access to as much relevant information as possible so they can best conduct screening and vetting and make informed decisions about who should be permitted to enter the country.

- DHS should continue to expand ICE's Visa Security Program, which helps facilitate the investigation and enhanced screening of visa applicants at high-risk consular posts abroad.
- DHS and the State Department should expand the use of information found on social media to screen and vet foreign nationals, and should work with Congress to ensure they have the resources needed to better integrate social media information into their screening and vetting processes.
- Merging the functions of the Terrorist Screening Center (TSC) into DHS's National Targeting Center (NTC) should be considered, especially since the TSC's role as an information sharing facilitator directly aligns with DHS' core missions and DHS is the largest consumer of the TSC's watchlist.
- A review should be conducted to ensure each foreign national is receiving the appropriate level of scrutiny prior to being admitted to the country.
- DHS should build on current initiatives to continuously screen foreign nationals, in a risk based manner, to identify individuals who may potentially pose a threat after entering the homeland.

Due to both policy and capabilities challenges, some of our Visa Waiver Program partners are unable to fully implement the program requirements and collaborate with the United States as closely as needed given the heightened threat environment.

- Some European partners cannot engage in automated and continuous information sharing, or share biometric information on known and suspected terrorists, with the U.S. and each other.
- Some partners are unable or unwilling to share Advance Passenger Information (API) and Passenger Name Record (PNR) data that is important to U.S. security screening efforts.
- Several partners do not utilize the information shared as part of the VWP for screening and vetting operations, or lack the capability to integrate advanced data into their processes.
- DHS should continue to utilize the existing legal requirements of the program, especially those established by the *Visa Waiver Program Improvement and Terrorist Travel Prevention Act* (P.L. 114-113), to encourage and foster closer security cooperation with our Visa Waiver Program partners.

Chairman Michael McCaul (TX)
House Homeland Security Committee

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