



**Statement for the Record**

**The Honorable Francis X. Taylor  
Under Secretary for Intelligence and Analysis  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security**

**The Honorable Leon Rodriguez  
Director  
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services**

**The Honorable Huban A. Gowadia  
Deputy Administrator  
Transportation Security Administration**

**The Honorable Daniel H. Ragsdale  
Deputy Director  
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement**

**The Honorable Kevin K. McAleenan  
Deputy Commissioner  
U.S. Customs and Border Protection**

**Before the**

**U.S. House of Representatives  
Committee on Homeland Security**

**Regarding  
“Shutting Down Terrorist Pathways into America”  
September 14, 2016**

Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Thompson, and distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) efforts to prevent foreign terrorist groups from traveling to the United States to launch attacks. We look forward to discussing our joint progress in preventing terrorist attacks directed at the Homeland.

In the 15 years since the tragic attacks on September 11, 2001, DHS, with critical support from our interagency partners, has implemented comprehensive measures to enhance our immigration and border management systems and prevent the travel of terrorists to and within the United States, including:

- Implementing robust, continuous, and timely **screening and vetting** capabilities;
- Preventing and disrupting **illicit migration** of Special Interest Aliens to and across U.S. borders;
- Expanding **information sharing** with our federal, State, local, and international partners;
- Enhancing DHS **aviation security** efforts; and
- Building community partnerships to **Counter Violent Extremism**.

DHS recognizes that the types of attacks we have seen at home and abroad are not just terrorist-directed attacks, but also terrorist-inspired attacks. These attacks are conducted by those who live among us in the homeland and self-radicalize, inspired by terrorist propaganda on the internet. Terrorist-inspired attacks are often difficult to detect by our intelligence and law-enforcement communities. They can occur with little or no notice, and present a complex homeland security challenge.

The current threat environment requires new types of responses. The United States, along with our coalition partners, continues to take the fight to terrorist organizations overseas. ISIL is the most prominent terrorist organization on the world stage. As ISIL loses territory, it has increased attacks and attempted attacks on targets outside of Iraq and Syria. It continues to encourage attacks in the United States, which makes our work ever more critical.

## **Screening and Vetting**

Every day, the Department works within the scope of its diverse authorities and programs to ensure that terrorists are denied access to sensitive and secure locations and infrastructure, and stopped from traveling to or within our country.

DHS is continually refining its risk-based strategy and layered approach to border security, extending our zone of security as far outward from the Homeland as possible to interdict threats before they ever reach the United States.

To mitigate the potential threat of foreign terrorist fighters who attempt to travel to and from Syria, the Department uses intelligence and law enforcement information in conjunction with advance passenger information to detect foreign terrorist fighters and others who pose a potential threat to the United States. Equally important, DHS works in close partnership with carriers and international counterparts to prevent passengers who may pose a security threat, or who are otherwise inadmissible, from boarding flights to the United States. The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) vets all passengers traveling inbound to the United States against terrorist watchlists and can adjust its vetting in a risk-based manner to provide additional focus on specific travel patterns or locations. Since January 2016, nearly 7,000 known or suspected terrorists were denied boarding or received secondary screening at airports worldwide due to the rigor of the Secure Flight program.

DHS has continued to push the borders outwards through the growth of its pre-clearance program, managed through the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP). CBP personnel at 15 airports overseas pre-clear air travelers before they board flights to the United States and coordinates with TSA for boarding of aircraft. In FY 2015, Preclearance allowed DHS to deny boarding to over 10,700 travelers (or 29 per day) before they could travel to the United States. TSA personnel assist CBP by working with host governments to ensure all pre-cleared flights are subject to security measures commensurate to U.S. requirements. We are looking to expand this program – in May, CBP announced an “open season,” running through August 1, for foreign airports to express interest in participating in the next round of preclearance expansion. CBP received 20 letters of interest and is currently in the process of evaluating each location.

Through the Visa Security Program (VSP), U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) personnel at diplomatic posts overseas identify terrorists, criminals, and other individuals who pose a threat or are otherwise ineligible for visas prior to their travel or application for admission to the United States. ICE works collaboratively with other U.S. agencies and host countries’ law enforcement counterparts to investigate suspect travelers, enhance existing information, and identify previously unknown threats instead of simply denying visas and any potential travel. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2015, VSP reviewed over two million visa applications, contributing input to approximately 8,600 cases in which visas were refused. Of these refusals, over 2,200 applicants had some known or suspected connection to terrorism or terrorist organizations.

We have significantly strengthened the Visa Waiver Program (VWP) vetting process. All VWP travelers must submit their data to the Electronic System for Travel

Authorization (ESTA) before they travel to the United States. This screening now includes obtaining additional key data elements from VWP travelers and greater collaboration with interagency law enforcement and intelligence partners. ESTA information is screened against the same counterterrorism and law enforcement databases as traditional visas, and must be approved prior to an individual boarding a plane bound for the United States for VWP travel. This enhanced screening has identified more than 1,600 travelers as presenting potential law enforcement or security risks in FY 2016.

On December 18, 2015, the President signed into law the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2016, which included the Visa Waiver Program Improvement and Terrorist Travel Prevention Act of 2015 (VWP Improvement Act). The VWP Improvement Act codified VWP enhancements implemented earlier that year. It also established new restrictions on eligibility for travel to the United States without a visa for individuals who visited or are dual nationals of certain countries. We began implementing the new restrictions on January 21, 2016. Waivers from these restrictions are only granted on a case-by-case basis, and only when it is in the law enforcement or national security interests of the United States. It is important to note that those who are no longer eligible to travel to the United States under the VWP as a result of the new law may still apply for a visa at a U.S. Embassy or Consulate.

In February, pursuant to the VWP Improvement Act, the Secretary added three additional countries – Libya, Yemen and Somalia – to a list that generally prohibits anyone who has visited these nations in the past five years from traveling to the United States without a visa. Most recently, in April, we began enforcing the mandatory use of high security electronic passports for all VWP travelers. In both February and June, CBP enhanced the ESTA application by requiring responses to additional questions.

We have expanded our use of social media, which is currently used for more than 30 different operational and investigative purposes within the Department. Based upon the recommendations of a Social Media Task Force within DHS, the Secretary determined, consistent with relevant privacy and other laws, that DHS must expand the use of social media even further, particularly in the screening and vetting mission set. We note that our use of social media information is limited to publicly available information, consistent with DHS authorities, and maintained and handled in accordance with the Privacy Act and relevant System of Records Notices.

Working closely with the Science and Technology Directorate, we conducted a number of pilots to automate the bulk screening of social media information with human review across a number of our high-priority populations, including refugee and ESTA applicants. These pilots have shown promise, and we are now conducting operational testing against live cases. The Science and Technology Directorate continues to work with industry to

leverage the billions of dollars of private sector investment in social media analytics to identify solutions that can best support DHS screening and vetting.

DHS is doing its part to address the Syrian refugee crisis. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), in conjunction with the Department of State, have worked to admit more than 10,000 Syrian refugees this fiscal year. All refugees, including Syrians, are admitted only after successful completion of a stringent security screening process. Refugees are subject to the highest level of security checks of any category of traveler to the United States.

Additional enhancements to the standard refugee screening process have been added for Syrian refugees. USCIS and the State Department ensure that all refugees successfully complete extensive, multi-layered and intense screening processes. These processes involve multiple law enforcement, national security, and intelligence agencies across the Federal Government. For certain categories of refugees, we have added other security checks as warranted.

### **Preventing Illicit Migration**

Special Interest Aliens (SIAs) represent a relatively small proportion of illicit migration to and across U.S. borders. However, due to the potential threat posed by this group, Secretary Johnson has made preventing illicit SIA migration a priority. On June 24, 2016, he issued a directive establishing the DHS SIA Joint Action Group (JAG). The JAG developed a consolidated plan of action to enhance and better coordinate DHS's efforts to identify and disrupt human smuggling networks that facilitate illicit SIA migration to and across U.S. borders. The plan, which was signed by Secretary Johnson on August 31, leverages Department-wide capabilities to both extend our borders and to improve our processes to gather and share information on SIAs with international, interagency, and state and local partners.

The plan contains five strategic goals:

- (1) Build an integrated screening solution with partner countries along illicit migration routes;
- (2) Strengthen those countries' investigative capabilities;
- (3) Improve their detention and repatriation capacity;
- (4) Enhance DHS intelligence integration and coordination; and
- (5) More efficiently and effectively collect information from SIAs who arrive at our borders.

## **Information Sharing**

In response to the tragic attacks of September 11, 2001, DHS has worked closely with our federal, state, and local partners to improve our domestic information sharing architecture. Today, the National Network of Fusion Centers serves as the cornerstone of this architecture, providing grassroots intelligence and analytic capabilities to their customers at the state and local levels.

In addition to the benefits provided to state and local partners, fusion centers are unique resources in the Homeland Security Enterprise, providing subject-matter expertise and critical state and local information to the Federal Government. Fusion centers help identify previously unknown threats or trends by contributing raw information, including Suspicious Activity Reporting, to DHS, Joint Terrorism Task Forces (JTTFs), and the Intelligence Community. They collaborate with federal partners to conduct joint analytic collaboration to detect patterns in criminal and terrorist activities, and support the JTTFs' terrorism-related investigations. The Department supports their efforts by providing personnel, training and assistance, security clearances, and connectivity to unclassified and classified federal systems.

The Homeland Security Information Network (HSIN) is our primary platform to share unclassified information and facilitate real-time collaboration and situational awareness. In particular, we share unclassified intelligence and analysis via the HSIN-Intelligence (HSIN-Intel) Community of Interest. HSIN-Intel is a secure platform for intelligence professionals and enhances collaboration, analytical exchange, and timely information sharing with our state and local partners.

Using the Department's unique information and sharing it with our Intelligence Community partners at appropriate levels of classification is critical. To achieve this, the "DHS Data Framework" initiative is integrating the Department's most important datasets so we can compare DHS data with travel, immigration, and other information at the unclassified and classified levels. This will enable multiple, cleared users from Components with a need-to-know to more readily access the information they need to make quick and informed security decisions. We are building the Data Framework alongside our Intelligence Community partners' technology modernization efforts, including the Intelligence Community Information Technology Enterprise initiative. This will maximize our ability to use, protect, and share information with our partners consistent with all applicable laws, regulations, and policies that protect privacy and civil liberties.

The Department has also expanded information sharing and vetting cooperation with international partners. This work serves two purposes. First to gain new insight into an individual's immigration application including their identity and whether they pose an

immigration, law enforcement or terrorism risk. Second to support our allies' national vetting efforts, reducing the odds that terrorists or criminals may use a partner's territory as a staging ground. To date, through our Secure Real-Time Platform, we have vetted over 300,000 immigration applications for international partners, helping them to identify potential travel by known or suspected terrorists. We have also recently begun to compare select refugee applications and enforcement cases against foreign data.

## **Aviation Security**

During the last year, attacks against aircraft and airports in Egypt, Somalia, Belgium, and Turkey have underscored the continued threat to aviation. The Department is taking aggressive steps to enhance aviation and airport security globally. Despite increased travel volume, DHS has not compromised aviation security. Instead, with the support of Congress, we have surged resources and added personnel to address the increased volume of travelers.

TSA has worked aggressively to refocus on security effectiveness. Since last summer, TSA has retrained the entire Transportation Security Officer (TSO) workforce, increased use of random explosive trace detectors, tested and reevaluated screening equipment, enhanced certain manual screening procedures, and eliminated the Managed Inclusion II program, which randomly placed unknown travelers into in TSA Pre✓® lanes. TSA has also implemented centralized new-hire training at the TSA Academy, located at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center in Glynco, Georgia.

Further, in April of last year, TSA issued guidelines to domestic airports to reduce access to secure areas in order to address concerns about insider threats. Today, employee access points have been reduced and random screening of personnel within secure areas has increased. In collaboration with our airport partners, we are continuing our efforts. Earlier this year, TSA and airport operators completed detailed vulnerability assessments and mitigation plans for over 300 airports nationwide.

Finally, TSA has worked with foreign partners to strengthen security overseas Last-Point-of-Departure airports, and security at these airports remains a focus area in light of recent attacks overseas. Altogether, TSA's efforts have enhanced the security of our nation's aviation system.

## **Countering Violent Extremism**

Violent extremist threats come from a range of groups and individuals, including domestic terrorists and homegrown violent extremists in the United States, as well as international terrorist groups like al-Qaeda and ISIL. The threat begins with recruitment, inspiration and winning the hearts and minds of potential terrorists. Al Qaeda and ISIL

continue to target Muslim communities in our country to recruit and inspire individuals to commit acts of terror. In response to this threat, DHS formed the Office of Community Partnerships (OCP) in 2015. Building bridges to diverse communities and working to ensure families and communities are well-informed is the best defense against terrorist ideologies. This work is a DHS imperative. As the Secretary has testified, building communities is as important as any of our other homeland security missions.

OCP is now the central hub for the Department's efforts to counter violent extremism in this country as well as being the host for the Countering Violent Extremism Interagency Task Force. OCP's work is focused on partnering with and empowering communities by providing them a wide range of resources to use in preventing violent extremist recruitment and radicalization. Specifically, we are providing access to federal grant opportunities for community organizations and state and local leaders, and partnering with the private sector to find innovative, community-based approaches. DHS announced its first \$10 million in grants in July of this year.

### **Congressional Oversight**

We would like to take this opportunity to discuss the considerable efforts DHS devotes to complying with oversight requests. Congressional oversight requests to the Department come from 92 different Committees and Subcommittees with jurisdiction over DHS. Secretary Johnson has pledged transparency and candor with Congress, and has committed to respond to Congressional inquiries in a timely fashion. Under his leadership, the Department's responsiveness to oversight requests has improved by over 60 percent. We have cut our average response time from 42 business days to 17.

We accomplished this in spite of a significant increase in correspondence. During calendar year 2015, DHS received approximately 700 oversight letters and countless more oversight requests. At the current rate, we expect numbers of inquiries and responses will be significantly higher this year. Similarly, the hearing schedule has accelerated. We recognize and appreciate Congress's legitimate oversight responsibility, and we are making greater efforts to accommodate Congress's increasing demands.

### **Conclusion**

Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Thompson, and Members of the Committee, we thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss these important issues. We look forward to answering your questions.