



HOMELAND SECURITY COMMITTEE

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

“World Wide Threats: Keeping America Secure in the New Age of Terror”

November 30, 2017

Remarks as Prepared

I would like to thank each of the witnesses, Acting Secretary Elaine Duke, FBI Director Christopher Wray, and NCTC Director Nick Rasmussen for joining us today. You represent thousands of patriotic men and women who go to work every day to ensure the safety of their fellow Americans.

Everyone on this Committee is extremely grateful for your service.

Director Rasmussen – For over two decades you have helped navigate an unprecedented threat landscape and combat terrorism around the globe. You have been a great partner to this Committee and we all wish you the best of luck in retirement.

This past year has been a particularly devastating one. In just the last month we witnessed another terror attack in downtown New York and over the summer, parts of America, including my home state of Texas, were greatly impacted by hurricanes and other natural disasters.

We also saw several heinous acts of violence that included the mass shootings in Las Vegas and Sutherland Springs, and the hate-fueled homicides in Portland and Charlottesville.

Tens of millions of Americans also felt the effects of cyber-attacks from hackers and other cybercriminals. These are just a few of the horrors that hit our homeland.

Islamist Terrorism

Over the Thanksgiving break, an ISIS affiliated group attacked a mosque in the northern Sinai that left 305 people, including 27 children, dead. While this attack was thousands of miles away, it was a reminder of the savage nature of an enemy that always has our homeland in its sights.

In the aftermath of 9/11, the Department of Homeland Security was created to prevent further attacks and I believe we are better prepared than we were sixteen years ago. However, in that time al-Qaeda has expanded its global presence and ISIS has conquered parts of countries, slaughtered innocent civilians, and inspired new followers.

By using encrypted technology and by spreading incessant propaganda across the Internet, jihadists are recruiting new members, and planning new attacks. This has been obvious by a series of vehicular homicides across Europe. Cities known for their history and culture: Paris, Berlin, London, Nice, Barcelona, and Brussels, are becoming more familiar as terror targets.

The attack on Halloween in New York City was proof that our homeland is also susceptible to this new line of attack. Terrorists are answering Sheik Adnani's call to kill Westerners using whatever means necessary wherever they are. And while our enemies are always adjusting their tactics, we know that our aviation sector is still their crown jewel of targets.

Earlier this month, our Committee was briefed about aspects of airport security. To our dismay, it was made clear that we have a long way to go.

We must do more to address the threat posed by foreign fighters who have fled the battlefield and remain one flight away.

Consequently, we have identified key areas that need improvements and look forward to working with TSA to see them through.

To help defeat terrorists, we must work with private tech companies to limit their communication capabilities, and use all of our economic and military resources to dry up their funding and crush them on the battlefield.

Border Security

Another ongoing challenge is keeping our borders secure. Human traffickers, gangs like MS-13, drug smugglers, and potential terrorists are continually looking for new ways to sneak into our country.

We must do whatever we can to stop this illegal entry, especially of those who wish to do us harm.

In October, this Committee took a big step in the right direction by passing the *Border Security for America Act*.

This legislation, which I introduced, calls for building additional physical barriers, which include a wall, fencing, new technology, and a surge in personnel.

It targets drug and human traffickers at our ports of entry and will help identify visa overstays through the full deployment of a Biometric Entry-Exit System. Our homeland cannot be secure without strong borders and I look forward to getting this bill to the floor.

Natural Disasters

This year's hurricane season devastated many cities and towns in Texas, Louisiana, Florida, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

After Hurricane Harvey, I personally toured much of the wreckage back home. Roads were flooded, homes were destroyed, and many people lost their lives.

However, I was amazed by the strength demonstrated by people who braved dangerous conditions to support one another; Texans helping Texans.

I was also impressed by the quick action taken by our heroic first responders and by the emergency response at the federal, state, and local levels, thanks to a coordinated effort led by FEMA.

A broader recovery will take a long time. But I know that if we continue to work together, we'll be able to successfully rebuild the communities that were shattered by these powerful storms.

Cybersecurity

America's cybersecurity networks are also under constant attack.

In September, we learned that Equifax had been successfully hacked and 145.5 million people may have been affected by the breach. Last week it was reported that 57 million people who use Uber, might have had their personal information stolen from a cyberattack in 2016. This cannot continue.

Fortunately, our Committee has made strengthening DHS's cybersecurity mission a top priority. In 2014, bipartisan Committee efforts resulted in enactment of legislation that provided DHS expedited hiring authority; ensured DHS is assessing its cybersecurity workforce; and clarified the department's role in the cybersecurity of federal networks.

In 2015, the Cybersecurity Act, provided liability protections for public to private and private-to-private cyber threat information sharing. We have had some success, but we need to do more. And that is why this Committee passed a bill to elevate and operationalize DHS's cyber office to better protect digital America.

Domestic Terror Attacks

Finally, domestic terror attacks and violence ignited by white supremacists, the KKK, or anyone else who preaches prejudice, must not be tolerated. As I have stated before, threatening the safety of others and using intimidation tactics to advance political or religious beliefs is simply unacceptable.

Too often, we are seeing that our differences lead to violence and this must be stopped.

As a nation, we should stand together and reject any type of hatred that seeks to divide our neighbors as enemies. This is an issue we will explore further in our second panel.

Conclusion/Homeland Security Must be Bipartisan

There are certainly other threats – from ballistic missiles and WMD programs in North Korea and Iran, to the continued undermining of American interests by nation states including Russia. As we face these threats we must put our homeland security before partisanship and politics.

I am proud to say that this Committee has a long track record of doing just that. We have improved information sharing for counterterrorism efforts and increased support for first responders. In July, the House passed the first ever, comprehensive reauthorization of DHS with an overwhelming bipartisan vote.

This reauthorization will allow DHS to more faithfully carry out its mission of safeguarding our homeland, our people, and our values, and I am hopeful the Senate will take up this vital bill as soon as possible.

Once again, I'd like to thank today's witnesses for joining us and for their continued cooperation with our Committee.

I look forward to discussing how we can best tackle these worldwide threats so we can best secure our nation.

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