

Opening Statement of Chairman Thomas R. Carper
“Threats to the Homeland”
November 14, 2013

As prepared for delivery:

Today’s hearing will consider threats to the U.S. homeland from terrorists, cyber attackers, homegrown extremists and lone wolf offenders. The objective of the hearing is for this committee to get a better understanding of how these threats have evolved over the past year and if our national security agencies are keeping up with these ever-changing threats.

Twelve years ago, our country’s sense of security was upended when Al-Qaeda launched the most significant attack on U.S. soil since Pearl Harbor. In the years since that tragic day, we have made significant progress in combatting the terrorist threat to the homeland.

Our aviation system is more secure. Our borders are stronger. Our government agencies share more terrorist intelligence than ever before. Our first responders are better prepared to deal with disasters and terrorist attacks. Americans are safer because of these efforts. While we have made great strides, our system for preventing terrorist attacks is not perfect.

One of my guiding principles is—if it’s not perfect, make it better. In this spirit, this committee will continue its work to improve America’s defenses against terrorism and other threats. Part of this process means understanding that the threat is also evolving. If we are to make America safer from these threats – and secure the homeland – we must do a better job of anticipating these evolving threats.

We do a good job at fighting the last war, but to secure the homeland we must be better at anticipating the next war. We know that the threat from al Qaeda has changed over the past decade.

We are now dealing with a number of splinter groups, including Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula which was responsible for the Christmas Day attack in 2009 and which continues its efforts to attack us to this day. And we know that American citizens, as well as Canadian and European nationals, have taken up arms in Syria, Yemen, and Somalia. The threat that these individuals could return home to carry out attacks is real, and troubling.

Even as our borders and ports of entry have become more secure, there are still those within our borders who have become radicalized by online al-Qaeda propaganda and seek to carry out their own attacks against the U.S. And there are other threats to our domestic security – unrelated to al-Qaeda – which we must be prepared to address.

As the September attack on the Washington Navy Yard and the shooting at the Los Angeles airport two weeks ago demonstrate, there are a variety of threats to federal personnel and federal facilities that we must be prepared to defend against. However, nowhere is the need to prepare for the next attack more pressing than in the cybersecurity realm.

In the words of former FBI Director Robert Mueller, cyber threats may ‘equal or surpass the threat of terrorism in the foreseeable future.’ With a few key strokes, hackers can shut down our electric grid, release dangerous chemicals into the air we breathe, or disrupt our financial markets.

Now more than ever, we must come together to pass cybersecurity legislation that strengthens our defenses against these cyber threats. The threat is too great, the potential consequences too severe, to do nothing. Today’s hearing will explore these threats, as well as others.

We will hear testimony from the leaders of the Department of Homeland Security, the National Counter Terrorism Center and the Federal Bureau of Investigation about the greatest dangers to the homeland and the steps our government is taking to further secure our country.

The findings from today’s hearing will help continue our process of recalibrating our homeland defenses to address our current threats, as well as prepare for tomorrow’s threat. It will also help us ensure that we have a government in place that can connect the dots before terror comes to our shores. I look forward to working with our witnesses and the members of this committee as we seek to defeat these threats and keep Americans safe from those who wish to do us harm.

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