



United States Senate
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
Chairman Joseph I. Lieberman, ID-Conn.

Opening Statement of Chairman Joseph I. Lieberman
Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee
“The Future of Homeland Security: Evolving and Emerging Threats”

Washington, DC

July 11, 2012

AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

Good morning and welcome to our distinguished panel of witnesses to this first in a series of hearings where we will begin looking at the evolution and future of homeland security.

This coming November will mark the tenth anniversary of the signing into law of the Homeland Security Act legislation created in this Committee in the aftermath of al Qaeda’s attack on 9-11. Given this coming milestone, it seems appropriate not only to reflect on the major homeland security developments of the last decade but also to look ahead to the next ten years, and examine whether we are adequately prepared to address them.

The preeminent threat to our homeland security today remains the threat of terrorism, but our enemies have grown and evolved since 9-11. Core Al Qaeda, based on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border has suffered significant losses but remains dangerous. Its affiliates in Yemen, Somalia, Iraq, and North Africa continue to grow, as do allied groups such as Lashkar-e Taiba and Tehrik-e Taliban in Pakistan.

Homegrown terrorists, inspired by violent Islamist extremism, like Maj. Nidal Hasan, remain a danger. Increasingly in the last year we’ve also seen stepped-up efforts from Iranian-linked groups to plan attacks and recruit terrorists. We also see increasing threats domestically and in Europe from both right-wing and left-wing extremist groups.

One key question for today is how the terrorist threat is likely to evolve in the next decade, in response to political developments such as the Arab Spring and technological developments - like the Internet and social media - that have altered the way terrorist organizations can recruit and radicalize. How prepared are our key counterterrorism organizations for major shifts in the threat?

The cyber threat is the second most significant threat to the United States that we face today, and as FBI Director Mueller has noted, could surpass terrorism as America’s top national security threat in the coming years. Attacks from cyberspace by rival nations, terrorists, criminal gangs and individual hackers are already costing us billions of dollars in economic damage through theft of money as well as intellectual property. Beyond this dollar loss, there is the potential to use computers to sabotage critical infrastructure, like electric utilities and pipelines that could lead to loss of life and environmental and economic disasters.

Cybersecurity has been a major focus of this Committee and Sen. Collins and I are working hard at getting our bipartisan cybersecurity legislation brought to the floor of the Senate during this work period and signed into law this year.

Other significant threats to our homeland security have gained increased attention in recent years. The violence in Mexico by drug trafficking organizations has reached the level where it is now a direct threat to our national security. Transnational organized criminal groups are becoming increasingly sophisticated and are engaged in a wide variety of activities, from human smuggling to Medicare fraud.

All of these national security threats – terrorism, cyber threats, drug violence, and organized crime – should not be looked at in isolation, but in terms of how they relate to each other. Increasingly we see cases

where these different threats are interwoven. For example, last year Iranian agent Mansour Arbabsiar attempted to hire a hit man from the drug trafficking organization known as the Zetas in Mexico to carry out his plot to assassinate the Saudi Ambassador to the U.S. here in Washington.

But while our threats are becoming increasingly interrelated, we continue to address them in a fragmented way, with different agencies responsible for different threats. While the efforts of agencies are robust within each of these threat domains, too often there is limited information sharing and coordination across these different domains.

One key question for our witnesses today is whether and how the US government needs to evolve to address these increasing linkages among our adversaries.

Finally, we are also looking today not only at deliberate homeland security threats but also future trends related to threats from natural hazards or man-made accidents. The fact of climate change is becoming increasingly apparent, and we are seeing increasingly severe weather events as a result.

We also see increasing examples of natural disasters having cascading effects – most notably in Japan last year with the earthquake and tsunami leading to the Fukushima nuclear disaster. But also on a much smaller scale, in the DC metro area last week, we saw the ‘derecho’ storm system lead to wide-scale power outages that disrupted the water lines, gasoline supplies, and emergency communications in our nation’s capital region. The fallout from extreme weather has caused more than two dozen deaths nationally and put countless more lives at risk.

I look forward to discussing all of these issues with our witnesses today, in order to get a better understanding of the evolving types of threats that DHS and its partners are likely to face in the coming decade. We need to focus on anticipating these threats and then use our understanding to make the prudent investments to address them.

Senator Collins.