

Chairman Peters Opening Statement As Prepared for Delivery
Full Committee Hearing: Threats to the Homeland
November 17, 2021

Thank you to our witnesses for joining us and for your continued service to the American people. This hearing is an important opportunity for this Committee to hear from our nation's top national security and law enforcement officials about the threats facing our nations –and how Congress can ensure the federal government is prepared to protect our communities from them.

More than twenty years ago, the September 11th terrorist attacks changed our nation forever. In response, Congress created the Department of Homeland Security and our entire national security apparatus focused on keeping Americans safe from international terrorism.

However, in the more than two decades following those attacks, the threats to our communities have evolved and become increasingly complex.

While we must continue to monitor international terror threats, there is no question that we must be better prepared to defend against what top national security officials, including those before us today, have called the most lethal terrorist threat to Americans: domestic terrorism fueled by white nationalist and anti-government ideologies.

Yesterday, I released a report detailing the results of my investigation. Alarming, my investigation found that DHS and FBI have not adequately addressed the evolving domestic terrorism threat.

Despite a requirement in law, written by myself and Senator Johnson, DHS and FBI have failed to effectively measure and share comprehensive data on the threat posed by violent domestic extremists, and specifically white supremacist and anti-government violence.

Without this comprehensive data, it is impossible for Congress and this Committee to determine whether our nation's counterterrorism resources are effectively aligned to tackle the domestic terrorism threat. We need a data-driven approach to preventing deadly incidents like the January 6th Capitol breach, the tragic shooting in Buffalo, and countless other domestic terrorist attacks that have been fueled by hateful extremist ideologies.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today about what resources and tools their agencies need to effectively collect data on domestic terrorism and prevent these crimes.

Today, we'll also have the opportunity to discuss the significant threat that cyber-attacks pose to our national and economic security.

I'm proud of the bipartisan work Senator Portman and I have led this Congress to enact some of the most significant reforms to our nation's cybersecurity policy in history.

Our reforms will ensure that DHS has the tools, resources, and authorities needed to protect critical infrastructure, state and local governments, and other targets from cyber-attacks.

However, there is more that must be done to continue securing our vulnerabilities from criminal hackers and foreign adversaries, and I look forward to discussing those topics today.

One of the most serious threats, and one of the toughest to tackle, is the threat posed by increasingly severe natural disasters and climate change.

This is an existential threat to our planet, and unless it is addressed, it will have a significant impact on our homeland security. Today, we'll hear more about how our national security agencies are tracking these challenges and how they are planning to address the security threats they present now and in the future.

We also have a challenging situation at our Southern Border, and today we'll discuss the Administration's work to secure both our Northern and Southern borders, and prevent illegal trafficking and stop the flow of deadly illicit drugs like fentanyl into our communities.

Those are difficult missions that must be accomplished ensuring that lawful international trade and travel can continue to flow smoothly at our ports of entry, and keep states like my home state of Michigan a hub for international commerce.

As our national security agencies continue to tackle these long standing threats, they must also be prepared to counter emerging ones. Over the last few years the threat posed by unmanned aerial systems, or drones, has become increasingly perilous. Small drones, which can be purchased off the shelf at any electronic store, can be weaponized by malicious actors to damage our nation's critical infrastructure or inflict mass casualties.

Today's drones could be used to launch remote attacks on everything from government buildings to crowds at public events, including large sports stadiums. We cannot let the current authorities that help address this grave threat expire in December, and I will continue working to ensure those important authorities are extended and updated.

Similarly, weaponized biological, chemical, nuclear, and radioactive materials, also remain a significant threat to our homeland security. I have introduced bipartisan legislation with Sen. Portman to reauthorize and strengthen the office in DHS charged with overseeing these threats, and I will continue working with my colleagues to pass it as soon as possible.

The scope and volume of these, and many other national security threats, requires Congress and the Administration to work together to ensure we are doing everything we can to keep Americans safe.

Today I am pleased to welcome back each of our witnesses to hear more about how their agencies are working to effectively carry out this daunting and essential mission. I look forward to a productive discussion.