

U.S. Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee

**“Ideology and Terror: Understanding the Tools, Tactics, and
Techniques of Violent Extremism”**

June 14, 2017

Ranking Member Claire McCaskill

Opening Statement

Thank you, Chairman Johnson. We just marked the one year anniversary of the Pulse nightclub attack, the worst mass shooting in our nation’s history. This anniversary and the recent, devastating events in Britain are a reminder that confronting terrorism and radicalization are battles that we have to wage every day. Matters as important as countering terrorism, stopping violent extremism, and protecting our country demand thoughtful, bipartisan solutions.

Since 9/11, we have relentlessly pursued a multifaceted counterterrorism campaign to protect our homeland from foreign threats. While we still face the very real possibility of terrorists abroad plotting to do us harm or discretely slipping into our country to carry out an attack as the 9/11 terrorists did, we have built robust systems and transformed and fine-tuned our national security apparatus so that it can focus on detecting and

preventing such instances. Because of our concentration on eliminating that type of attack, the nature of the threat has changed.

Recent terrorist attacks in the United States have been perpetrated by Americans who were radicalized here at home, and often those attacks have been on soft targets such as in San Bernardino and the Pulse nightclub. The Pulse attack in Orlando showed us how challenging it is to build defenses to protect against a shooting in a nightclub, and the recent attacks in Europe illustrate how difficult it is to prevent attacks involving cars targeting bystanders on the street. It's clear the threat from terrorists and the tactics used are evolving.

I am deeply concerned that the President's budget proposal jeopardizes people's security because it slashes funding for homeland counterterrorism measures. The President's budget cuts Visible Intermodal Prevention and Response (VIPR) teams. VIPR teams provide a critical presence in pre-security areas at airports, train stations and bus terminals.

President Trump's budget also calls for the complete elimination of the Law Enforcement Reimbursement Program, which provides financial assistance to local law enforcement agencies that help secure our airports. The President's budget would reduce the Port Security Grant Program and

the Transit Security Grant Program by more than 50 percent. And the Urban Area Security Grant Initiative, which helps prepare high-density urban areas for how to respond in the event of an attack, would be cut by approximately \$150 million. The President's proposal would also zero out the Complex Coordinated Terrorist Attacks Grant Program. I'm worried that these cuts will rob our law enforcement officials of the resources they need to detect, prevent, and respond to potential attacks.

While it is critical that we enhance our physical security and provide law enforcement with the resources they need to keep us safe, we also have to improve our efforts to stop Americans from becoming radicalized. The United States faces threats from a variety of sources including white supremacists, eco-terrorists, and ISIS and Al Qaeda members and sympathizers. In the context of Sunni-inspired violent extremism, which is where this hearing appears to be focused based on the witnesses, it's absolutely vital that any effort our government undertakes to counter violent extremism is done in partnership with and with the full engagement of the Muslim community.

In order to combat ISIS and other extremists' propaganda, we must have a healthy dialogue with Muslim and other community leaders as well

as ensure that resources are available to families and friends that may have concerns about loved ones who have become attracted to extremist rhetoric.

Unfortunately, some of the rhetoric we hear, including from some of the witnesses here today, is at odds with this approach. It is also in complete conflict with American principles and values. And most importantly, it would actually make the United States of America less safe. We need to spend less time stirring up anti-Muslim rhetoric and more time working on these issues and working with the majority of the Muslims who are peaceful and law abiding in this country and around the world.

We're lucky to have Michael Leiter testifying with us today. As the former Director of the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) during both the Bush and Obama administrations, Mr. Leiter understands the threats our country faces and he has extensive knowledge and expertise crafting strategies to go after the terrorists and protect the homeland. I am eager to hear Mr. Leiter's analysis and the lessons we can learn from the recent attacks in the U.K. and elsewhere. I would appreciate his thoughts on the President's budget, and I'm interested in recommendations to bolster the nation's safety and resilience. What can we do better to combat and prevent radicalization and extremism?

Mr. Chairman, in the wake of the tragic attacks in the United Kingdom and elsewhere throughout the globe, I encourage you to have hearings very soon with the federal agencies responsible for detecting, preventing, and responding to attacks. As the Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs Committee, we have a vital responsibility to hear from the individuals currently responsible for countering terrorism in our nation.

Thank you.