

Statement of Chairman Ron Johnson
“Jihad 2.0: Social Media in the Next Evolution of Terrorist Recruitment”
May 7, 2015

As prepared for delivery:

Good morning and welcome.

The horrific displays of violence committed by the terrorist group ISIS, and their exhortations for their followers to do the same in the U.S., have rightly placed a spotlight back on the threat of terrorism to the homeland. The most recent of these cowardly acts occurred when two Arizona men opened fire in Garland, Texas, just hours after posting pro-ISIS messages on social media. The almost weekly arrests of American citizens attempting to travel to conflict zones in Syria and Iraq in order to fight on behalf of organizations such as ISIS also is of great concern. Combined, these phenomena represent the evolving nature of terrorism.

Since that fateful day in September 2001, the United States has been combating groups and individuals who seek to attack, and if it were in their power, kill our people and destroy our way of life. While the threat has remained persistent, the methods used by terrorist organizations to recruit followers and carry out these attacks have changed. In order to understand the nature of the current threat to America, it is important to understand these changing recruitment methods and the challenges they pose.

Social media constitute a tool used by ISIS to radicalize followers and inspire them to commit acts of terror on their behalf in the United States and abroad. Earlier this month a Madison, Wis., man was arrested after attempting to join ISIS. He expressed support for the group and communicated with other alleged ISIS supporters through social media, and he is not alone. One of our witnesses today will tell us about the approximately 46,000 overt ISIS supporter accounts on Twitter.

Our law enforcement, intelligence and military efforts have kept the United States mostly safe. The changing nature of the threat, however, requires that we examine the complexities of modern terrorism and determine the risks posed by those who are radicalized in the U.S. and would carry out an attack on American soil. Additionally, we need to deter and prevent those who would travel to a foreign country and fight on behalf of a terrorist organization. Finally, we need to understand what efforts can be most effectively utilized to identify, reduce, and mitigate this threat.

Answering these questions requires that we understand the historical evolution of terrorism and terrorist recruitment, the utilization of social media and other technologies to radicalize and enable followers to act, and what approaches currently are being undertaken to confront these challenges. We have convened today's panel of experts to define the problem for the American people and work toward resolving it.

I thank all the witnesses for testifying today and I look forward to your testimony.