

Chairman Peters Opening Statement As Prepared for Delivery
Full Committee Hearing: Threats to the Homeland: Evaluating the Landscape 20 Years
After 9/11
September 21, 2021

Thank you to each of our witnesses for being here today and for your service to our nation. You have extremely challenging jobs and have shown an unwavering commitment to keeping the American people safe.

Every year, this Committee hears from our nation's top national security and law enforcement leaders to examine critical threats to our homeland security.

Our nation recently marked the 20th anniversary of the September 11th terrorist attacks. From the fearless first responders who bravely ran into danger to save others, to families who were torn apart, we must never forget the sacrifice and sorrow of that tragic day. We must also continue to support our selfless servicemembers who fought in Afghanistan, Iraq, and around the world.

It was out of the ashes of 9/11 that the Department of Homeland Security was created, with one primary mission, keeping Americans safe from all threats.

In the 20 years since those horrific attacks, the threats to our nation's safety have become increasingly complex and widespread.

We must stay vigilant to the threat posed by foreign terrorism, and we must do more to address the growing and deadly threat posed by domestic terrorists.

Our national security agencies have noted that domestic terrorism driven by white supremacist and anti-government ideologies poses the most lethal kinetic threat to our nation's safety.

In recent years, we have seen the tragic and deadly consequences of this threat, including massacres at houses of worship, and the shocking attack on the U.S. Capitol. We must do more to ensure that our counterterrorism resources are being used effectively to address this danger and prevent further violence.

Our nation also continues to experience an increasing number of cyber-attacks – which jeopardize sensitive information, and have the potential to disrupt our daily lives with just a few clicks of a button.

From the SolarWinds and Microsoft Exchange hacks, to the ransomware attack on the Colonial Pipeline, every sector of our economy and every level of our government are at risk of cyber-attacks from foreign adversaries or criminal organizations.

Our financial networks, critical infrastructure, and vital institutions all remain vulnerable to these relentless attacks, and we must ensure we are taking every possible measure to secure our networks, hold these attackers accountable, and deter future breaches.

Finally, one of the most challenging threats to our homeland security does not come from a foreign nation or criminal group. It does not follow an ideology.

Yet year after year, we see the destruction caused by severe storms, hurricanes, wildfires and other natural disasters. These disasters, driven by worsening climate change, pose an existential threat to our nation – and to our entire planet.

The scale and severity of the security threats we are facing today can be daunting, and given the increasing strains placed on the Department of Homeland Security, we must ensure they have the resources and personnel to effectively carry out all of their critical missions.

From securing our borders, including our Southern Border that is currently seeing an unprecedented number of migrants seeking safety and security in the United States, to responding to numerous natural disasters, and taking on the lead role in vetting and resettling Afghan refugees, DHS is playing a vital role in many of the most urgent issues facing our nation.

DHS personnel, along with our FBI and other national security personnel, are on the frontlines working to address so many critical situations.

While many of us will never know the names of the thousands of personnel working tirelessly behind the scenes at your agencies to protect our country, we are all counting on you; and I appreciate each of our witnesses for taking the time to join us today.

I look forward to a comprehensive and insightful discussion on how we can best safeguard our nation.