

## **Opening Statement of Chairman Ron Johnson: “Threats to the Homeland”**

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Thursday, October 8, 2015

*As submitted for the record:*

Each year, this committee holds a hearing to explore the greatest security threats facing our nation. Our objective today is to outline these threats for the American public, discuss how threats have changed over this past year, and discuss what the Department of Homeland Security and law enforcement and intelligence counterterrorism agencies are doing to keep our nation safe.

Today we will focus on cybersecurity, border security, and countering homegrown terrorists and foreign terrorist organizations who aim to harm America. We will also learn more about the Syrian refugee population and the role that Internet propaganda plays in inciting a new generation of terrorists on social media.

Terrorists continue to adapt their methods to exploit procedural, technological and security gaps in our cyber and aviation sectors. A recent CNN report noted a skyrocketing number of cyberattacks against federal agencies, with more than 61,000 attacks in 2013. In July the Office of Personnel Management reported that 21.5 million federal employees were affected by a breach of its systems. In addition, this committee has held a number of hearings at which witnesses have discussed weaknesses at our southwest and northern borders that could be exploited by terrorists.

Administration officials report that more than 28,000 foreign fighters have traveled to Syria and Iraq. Of those, at least 5,000 are Westerners, approximately 250 of them Americans. There they gain lethal knowledge and combat experience with weapons and explosives training, making them more dangerous should they return home. In addition to the threat posed by these “foreign fighters,” the war in Syria has created a humanitarian crisis of more than 4 million registered Syrian refugees. Some of these individuals seek refuge in the U.S., so we need to discuss the screening challenges in front of us to prevent potential terrorists from getting into this country.

The threat from homegrown terrorists and foreign terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda, Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), ISIS and the Khorasan group is not diminishing, and the committee wants to learn how these groups are evolving. ISIS’ use of social media has been particularly effective in communicating with and inciting homegrown violent extremists. Today, we will discuss what measures your agencies have deployed to defend against this emerging threat.

There is no question that there are terrorists, rogue nations and other criminal elements who want to harm this nation, but it is important to maintain perspective and not to overstate the threats. I’m thankful to be able to host this forum with such distinguished witnesses. I thank the witnesses for appearing today, and I look forward to your testimony.