

Opening Statement of Chairman Johnson
“Adapting to Defend the Homeland Against the Evolving International Terrorist Threat”
December 6, 2017

As submitted for the record:

The mission statement of this Committee is to enhance the economic and national security of America and promote more efficient, effective, and accountable government. The Committee’s four priorities for homeland security are border security, cybersecurity, protecting our critical infrastructure, and countering Islamist terrorism and homegrown violent extremism. Through 10 hearings on terrorism and extremism, our Committee has explored the changing threat environment.

More than sixteen years after the tragedy of September 11th, our homeland is confronted with variations of the same terrorist threat. Even as we successfully target and degrade terrorist adversaries, their ideas survive to inspire others. The strategies of a global Islamist jihad have shifted over the past half century to adapt to the changing international landscape and our homeland defense must adapt as well.

Last year, during our annual hearing on threats to the homeland, witnesses testified that we could expect a diaspora of terrorist fighters unlike we had ever seen before. This past September, during the same hearing, we heard different testimony from NCTC Director Rasmussen. While he noted that the large inflow of terrorist foreign fighters to Iraq and Syria has resulted in outflow, he stated that the diaspora “is not nearly as large in volume” as anticipated. Our witnesses this year described fighters willing to stay and die in the conflict zone to defend the so-called “caliphate” and supporters in other nations staying put to attack where they are.

Military victories over ISIS in recent months have reduced its territorial control in Iraq and Syria by over 95 percent from its 2014 peak. While these victories are worth celebrating, the enemies we defeated in Raqqa are exploiting the frontier of cyberspace. There they seek to leverage social media to recruit vulnerable minds to carry out attacks on their behalf. This is the new phase of the threat facing our homeland. This witness panel represents the interagency response needed to confront that threat.

The remnants of ISIS and other terrorist groups are seeking refuge in areas where governance is weak and they can operate with impunity. American forces, currently deployed at the invitation of several nations, assist legitimate governments by training their armed forces and enabling them to confront terrorism. At the same time, members of the FBI and NCTC work tirelessly at home and abroad, forecasting terrorists’ next steps while DHS pushes our borders out to keep the homeland secure.

I want to thank the witnesses for being here. They, and the patriotic Americans with whom they serve, work tirelessly to keep us safe. I look forward to discussing the interrelated threats to our security—at home and abroad—and the steps we can take together to safeguard our nation.