

Chairman Johnson's Opening Statement
"Evolving Threats to the Homeland"
Thursday, September 13, 2018

As prepared for delivery:

The purpose of this hearing is to increase the public's awareness of evolving threats to the homeland, specifically cyberattacks on critical infrastructure, unmanned aerial systems, electromagnetic pulses and geomagnetic disturbances, and risk to our communication and information technology supply chain. Any of these threats could cause significant damage to the nation and the lives of everyday Americans.

Cyber attacks against critical infrastructure, commercial and military assets represent a growing threat to our national and economic security. This issue is complex, and promises to become even more complex as technology progresses. We need to properly define the problem and organize our efforts to counter what could create an existential threat to our nation.

Unmanned aerial systems, or drones, could pose a variety of threats to the United States. To address this threat, the Committee passed the Preventing Emerging Threats Act of 2018. The bill would provide the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Justice necessary authorities in an attempt to counter malign use of drones. We know the threat is real. In 2011, the Federal Bureau of Investigation arrested and charged a U.S. citizen for planning an attack on the Pentagon and U.S. Capitol with an explosive attached to a drone. Just last month we saw news reports of explosives-laden drones used to target the Venezuelan dictator Nicolas Maduro. I urge Congress to swiftly pass this important piece of legislation so we can address this threat.

Electromagnetic pulses and geomagnetic disturbances are low probability, but high-risk occurrences that possess the ability to cause significant damage to our nation's critical infrastructure. To date, federal progress to address this risk has been woefully inadequate. The Department of Homeland Security has not finalized a strategy to protect and prepare U.S. critical infrastructure against electromagnetic pulses and geomagnetic disturbances, as required by a provision included in the 2017 National Defense Authorization Act. I am concerned that the Department is not making enough progress to address this vulnerability.

Finally, communication and information technology supply chain threats are increasingly pervasive and dangerous. The National Counterintelligence and Security Center has described our country as being "under systemic assault by foreign intelligence entities" who use our supply chains as vectors to commit espionage and steal valuable trade secrets. The risks posed by these threats have the ability to undermine our democracy, diminish our national security, and weaken our economy.

Today's hearing will solicit opinions from experts on how the federal government is addressing these evolving threats. I want to thank the witnesses for being here today, and I look forward to your testimony.