



Statement for the Record

Mr. Robin Taylor

Acting Deputy Under Secretary for Intelligence Operations,

Office of Intelligence and Analysis

U.S. Department of Homeland Security

Before the

U.S. Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee

“Adapting to Defend the Homeland Against the Evolving

International Terrorist Threat”

December 6, 2017

Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member McCaskill and distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today – along with my colleagues from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), and the Department of Defense (DOD) – to discuss how the U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s (DHS) Office of Intelligence and Analysis (I&A) helps protect the homeland in today’s dynamic threat environment. In my testimony today, I will characterize the evolving threat and describe how I&A is working to share intelligence and information with our domestic and international customers in support of counterterrorism activities in the homeland and around the world.

Today, the threat we face from terrorism is much more diverse than during the 9/11 period. While we have made it harder for terrorists to execute large-scale attacks, changes in technology have made it easier for adversaries to plot attacks in general, to radicalize new followers to commit acts of violence, and to recruit beyond borders. The problem is compounded by the use of simple, “do-it-yourself” terrorist tactics conveyed via highly sophisticated terrorist marketing campaigns to audiences across the world.

As Acting Secretary Duke testified before this committee in September, we at DHS are rethinking homeland security for this new age. In the past, we often spoke of the “home game” and “away game” in the context of protecting our country, with DHS especially focused on the former. But that line is now blurred. The dangers we face are becoming more dispersed, and threat networks are proliferating across borders. The shifting landscape challenges security, so we must move past traditional defense and non-defense thinking. This is why DHS is overhauling its approach to homeland security and bringing together intelligence, operations, interagency engagement, and international action in new ways and changing how we respond to threats to our country.

The rising tide of violence we see in the West is clear evidence of the serious threat. As our government takes the fight to groups such as Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham (ISIS) and al-Qa’ida (AQ), we will continue to see operatives disperse and focus more heavily on external operations against the United States, our interests, and our allies. While much of today’s hearing will focus on terrorist threats from Syria and Iraq, it is important to emphasize that the terrorist threat is fluid. Many terrorist groups continue to pose a risk to our security and safety.

Core AQ and its affiliates remain a major concern for DHS. Despite the deaths of many AQ senior leaders, the group and its affiliates maintain the intent, and, in some cases, the capability to facilitate and conduct attacks against U.S. citizens and facilities. The group and its affiliates have also demonstrated that capability to adjust tactics, techniques and procedures for targeting the West.

Likewise, we continue to monitor the evolving threat posed by ISIS. ISIS fighters’ battlefield experience in Syria and Iraq have armed it with advanced capabilities that most terrorist groups do not have. Even as the so-called “caliphate” collapses, ISIS fighters retain their toxic ideology and a will to fight. We remain concerned that foreign fighters from the U.S. or elsewhere who have traveled to Syria and Iraq and radicalized to violence will ultimately return to the U.S. or their home country to conduct attacks.

In addition to the threat of foreign fighters overseas, the threat from ISIS also contains a domestic component. ISIS utilizes a sophisticated messaging and propaganda capability, which enables it to reach a global audience as it encourages acts of violence wherever its followers are able. The group regularly disseminates high-quality media content on multiple online platforms. ISIS members continue to attempt to recruit and radicalize to violence Homegrown Violent Extremists (HVEs) through social media. The reach and popularity of social media has enabled HVEs to connect more easily with terrorist organizations, such as ISIS. We assess there is currently an elevated threat of HVE lone offender attacks by ISIS sympathizers, which is especially concerning because mobilized lone offenders present law enforcement with limited opportunities to detect and disrupt their plots.

In order to address this threat, DHS, and I&A, with the assistance and input it receives from DHS components, works to share intelligence and information with our domestic and foreign partners to help front-line operators identify, disrupt, and respond to developing threats. We are committed to continuing our efforts, along with our colleagues in the Intelligence Community (IC), to give our customers at DHS and in the homeland the information they need about terrorist tactics, techniques and procedures to better protect the homeland, and to partner with international counterterrorism allies to share information about terrorist threats.

I&A is the only member of the IC statutorily charged to share intelligence and threat information with state, local, tribal, territorial, and private sector (SLTTP) partners. To help these partners address the evolving terrorist threat, I&A produces tailored assessments on the motivations of HVEs, suspicious behavioral patterns, likely tactics and techniques, and preferred targets. Additionally, I&A partners with the FBI and fusion centers across the nation to produce intelligence products for state and local law enforcement on the trends and observable behaviors in individuals seeking to commit violence in the homeland.

On the international front, DHS continues to broaden and deepen international liaison efforts through DHS Attachés at post to improve our ability to share information with key foreign allies. As a part of that effort, I&A engages with foreign partners to share analytic and targeting methodology, chiefly by conducting analytic exchanges, to enhance the ability of DHS and foreign allies to identify individuals and travel routes, and prevent foreign fighter travel to foreign conflict zones.

The terrorist threat is dynamic, as those who operate individually or as part of a terrorist organization will continue to challenge our security measures and our safety. DHS will continue to work with our international counterparts and our colleagues within the FBI, NCTC, DOD, the Department of State, and across the IC to identify potential threats to our security, both at home and abroad.

Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member McCaskill, and distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to answering your questions.