



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Hearing Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)

U.S.-Iran Tensions: Implications for Homeland Security

January 15, 2020

Today, the Committee is meeting to examine the homeland security implications of the recent escalation in U.S.-Iran tensions in the wake of the killing of Qasem Soleimani. Iran and Iranian-linked terrorists have shown a capability and willingness to conduct terrorist attacks against the United States and our allies and interests abroad.

Clearly, the escalation of tensions between the United States and Iran could have dire consequences for the security of the Homeland. More broadly, the suspension of U.S.-led counterterrorism efforts against ISIS in the region, ostensibly in order to focus on the threat from Iran and its proxies, may allow ISIS to reconstitute in unsecured areas of Iraq and Syria. This would dramatically undermine the fight against ISIS and make U.S. interests abroad and home less safe.

As Members of Congress, we have an obligation to do everything in our power to protect our constituents by defending the Nation from physical attacks, cyber-attacks, and influence campaigns designed to undermine our democracy and sway public opinion in favor of Iran or its friends. I am deeply concerned that President Trump had no strategy and his Administration has failed to plan adequately for addressing the homeland security consequences that might follow military action in Iran.

The Administration must immediately put forward a measured, comprehensive strategy that accounts for potential threats to the Homeland from Iranian actors and their proxies. As part of that strategy, the Department of Homeland Security must ensure it is prepared for all contingencies related to the escalation in U.S.-Iran tensions. I look forward to a frank discussion today about what that strategy should be.

I am particularly interested in understanding how Iran could use its relatively sophisticated cyber capabilities against State and local governments and critical infrastructure to exact revenge for the death of Soleimani. We need to understand whether potential targets are prepared to defend against Iranian cyber threats, and what the Federal government can do to help them if they are not. Although there have been no specific threats to critical infrastructure, escalation of tensions with any adversary demand that we take stock of all the current measures we employ to defend ourselves. This is particularly true in the case of Iran, a country that is unpredictable in its responses and hides behind proxies and sympathizers to do its dirty work.

Toward that end, I would be remiss if I did not note that the Chemical Facilities Anti-Terrorism Standards Program is set to expire in April. Although this House has begun work on reauthorizing this important anti-terrorism program, the Senate has not. At this point, it is unclear if the Senate intends to work with the House to reauthorize the program. I urge the Senate to begin work on this national security priority. It would be irresponsible to allow the program to lapse at this time.

Finally, in recent weeks, we have seen an uptick in Iran's influence activity on social media. I do not need to tell anyone here that it is an election year, and influence activity is bound to increase. Given this Committee's election security work, I am concerned Iran might escalate its influence activities as we approach the election and want to understand what more the Federal government and its private sector partners should be doing to counter Iranian messaging. We need to be prepared to confront and defend against Iran's influence efforts and ensure the integrity of our democracy and our most sacred institutions.

We are fortunate to be joined by witnesses with vast experience with the Departments of State, Defense, and Homeland Security and expertise in matters related to Iran. I look forward to a productive discussion today and remain committed to ensuring this Committee does its part to help secure the Homeland from threats posed by Iran, its proxies, or any others who would seek to do America harm.

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