



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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

Global Terrorism: Threats to the Homeland, Part I

September 10, 2019

To begin, I want to note that tomorrow marks the 18th anniversary of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. We remember those that were lost that terrible day in New York, at the Pentagon, and in Shanksville, Pennsylvania. They and their loved ones are on Americans' minds and in our hearts at this time especially.

Today, I am pleased to welcome our distinguished panel of witnesses and appreciate their testimony before the Committee. That said, I want to say for the record it is unacceptable the Secretary of Homeland Security, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Director, and Acting Director of the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) refused a bipartisan invitation to testify at this hearing. This Committee has a longstanding practice of holding an annual hearing to examine threats to the homeland. We continue to face threats from foreign terrorist organizations and homegrown violent extremists, and communities like El Paso have suffered unspeakable tragedy from domestic terrorist attacks recently. Agreeing to come before the Committee at the end of October, over three months after our request was made, is not sufficient. We will continue to engage the Administration and ensure this Committee has the information necessary to carry out its oversight responsibilities.

As another year passes, Members of Congress – especially on this Committee – are reminded of the duty we have to counter the terrorism threats of today and tomorrow. Despite organizational setbacks and loss of physical territory, foreign terrorist organizations like ISIS and al-Qaeda remain capable and committed of conducting external attacks and influencing like-minded groups and individuals outside of Iraq and Syria, perpetuating a circle of violence and extremist rhetoric. One such attack took place on Easter Sunday this year, when a terrorist group, inspired by ISIS, killed over 250 people during coordinated attacks on three churches and hotels in Sri Lanka. Alarming, a recent Pentagon inspector general report stated that ISIS was resurging in Syria after the Administration's decision to withdraw U.S. troops from the country, refuting President Trump's own statements about ISIS being defeated.

The U.S. must find ways to responsibly and adequately support partners on the ground and advance efforts to keep ISIS from reestablishing itself. Additionally, Al-Qaeda and its affiliates are still active across parts of Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia. And the instability some of these regions is ripe for Jihadism to flourish. In fact, just last month, the State Department's Counterterrorism Coordinator Ambassador Nathan Sales stated "al-Qaeda is as strong as it has ever been" and has "let ISIS absorb the brunt of the world's counterterrorism efforts while patiently reconstituting itself." In Somalia, the al-Qaeda linked group "al-Shabaab" conducted an attack on a hotel, killing 26 people, including two American citizens, this past July. While we can't lose focus on terrorist groups like these, we are also facing a growing domestic terrorist — and particularly white nationalist — threat to our homeland. Addressing this threat, which is often transnational in nature, has long been taken a back seat to other threats faced by the United States.

Earlier this year, the mosque shootings in Christchurch, New Zealand, which left 51 dead, exemplified the growing transnational connections between white nationalist terrorists who inspire and communicate with each other across the world. Just last month in El Paso, Texas, 22 people were killed when a 21-year-old white nationalist terrorist opened fire on a Walmart using an AK-47 style assault rifle. The shooter drove 10 hours from his home in Allen, Texas, to El Paso specifically to target Hispanics. And in April, a 19-year-old white nationalist terrorist opened fire using an AR-15 style assault rifle inside the Chabad of Poway synagogue on the last day of Passover, in Poway, California, killing a 60-year-old woman. These attacks did not originate in a vacuum. Both of these white nationalist terrorists who killed people in Poway, California and El Paso, Texas cited Brenton Tarrant, the terrorist that carried out the Christchurch mosque

attacks in New Zealand as an inspiration. And sadly, these are just a few of the deadly domestic terrorism attacks linked to white supremacy extremism from this year. Over the last decade, over 70% of extremist-related killings in the U.S. were committed by right-wing extremists, many of whom flock to social media and online platforms to espouse their hateful and violent rhetoric.

Like other terrorists and terrorist groups, white supremacist extremists take advantage of social media and online platforms to promulgate their ideology and promote violence. On June 26, I held a hearing examining social media companies' efforts to counter online terror content and misinformation. Just last week, the Committee deposed the owner of 8chan, an online platform that has been linked to at least three acts of deadly white supremacist extremist violence. While we cannot lose focus on the foreign terrorist threat to the United States, we have to simultaneously address the real and persistent threat of domestic terrorism. And we can certainly do both.

Last month, I met with Acting DHS Secretary Kevin McAleenan in Jackson, Mississippi to discuss domestic terrorism at the public launching of the Homeland Security Advisory Council's Subcommittee for the Prevention of Targeted Violence Against Faith-Based Communities. Additionally, my legislation, the Domestic and International Terrorism DATA Act, was reported by the Committee by voice vote. The bill would require the government to publish an annual public report outlining domestic terrorist incidents and exactly what the government is doing to address these incidents. It would also require DHS to research how domestic terrorists are linked with transnational terrorist movements, including white supremacist movements. I look forward to the Committee taking up additional domestic terrorism legislation later this month.

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