



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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

Global Terrorism: Threats to the Homeland, Part II

October 30, 2019

This Committee was created in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Since the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security, the Committee has focused on ensuring the Department is fulfilling its mission to secure the homeland. I take this responsibility seriously, as has every Chairman of this Committee.

That is why it has been the Committee's practice to hold a hearing to assess global threats to the homeland and evaluate the Federal government's efforts to confront them. Congress and the American people deserve to hear about the threats we face directly from the officials charged with our Nation's security.

Today, I am deeply concerned about the state of the Department of Homeland Security. It has been 203 days since the Department last had a confirmed Secretary, and Acting Secretary McAleenan recently announced he is leaving after just six months on the job. His replacement will be the fifth person to lead DHS in fewer than three years. And even though Acting Secretary McAleenan is leaving tomorrow, the President has yet to announce who his replacement will be. What is the delay?

Overnight, we learned the White House may be trying to find a legal loophole to install the President's pick, who is not in the Department's order of succession, as Acting Secretary. This is completely unacceptable, and such a decision would raise serious constitutional questions.

Also unacceptable is the fact that the Transportation Security Administration Administrator has been dual-hatted as Acting Deputy Secretary of Homeland Security for the last six months. TSA Administrator and Deputy Secretary of Homeland Security are not part-time jobs — they each require someone's full attention.

Beyond the Secretary and Deputy Secretary, eleven components and offices within DHS are operating with acting leaders, and in all but two cases the President has yet to nominate anyone to fill these vacancies. This is an unprecedented situation with real consequences for the Department and the more than 240,000 men and women of DHS working to secure the homeland. Indeed, at no time during my tenure on this Committee have I been more concerned about DHS's ability to carry out its mission.

The chaos is not limited to the Department, unfortunately. The President is also on his sixth National Security Advisor, fifth Secretary of Defense, third FBI Director, and third Director of National Intelligence, including Acting officials. He also no longer has a Homeland Security Advisor or a White House Cybersecurity Coordinator. The President needs to fill positions critical to U.S. national security.

At the same time, terrorism threats to the homeland — both international and domestic — are unrelenting. Just over two weeks ago, President Trump pulled American troops out of Syria. This abrupt exit put an end to U.S. counterterrorism missions with the Kurds and complicated the Pentagon's raid on

ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Fortunately, their mission was successful thanks to the bravery and skill of our military members and intelligence professionals, and we honor them for their heroic service to our country.

While Al-Baghdadi is dead, the ISIS detainees who escaped Kurdish prisons pose a renewed threat to the U.S., and conditions on the ground are ripe for ISIS to reconstitute. Moreover, we abandoned our Kurdish allies, prompting them to make a deal with our adversary – the Russian-backed Syrian government.

I want to hear from our witnesses today about how these developments affect the global threat picture and what the implications are for the homeland.

Here at home, domestic terrorism is on the rise. One year ago, 11 members of the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh were gunned down by a perpetrator motivated by anti-Semitism and white supremacy. This year, congregants at a synagogue in Poway, California and shoppers at a Walmart in El Paso, Texas were killed by white supremacists. These attacks are increasingly linked to groups and individuals abroad, and many are exploiting social media to proliferate violent extremist content and incite others around the world.

Recent reports indicate the National Counterterrorism Center has begun to look at domestic terrorism, and last month DHS released its first Strategic Framework for Countering Terrorism and Targeted Violence. I hope we can hear about their efforts today. For too long this issue was not given the attention it deserved, and much more remains to be done.

Finally, I would note that the 2020 elections are just a year away.

Despite the Intelligence Community ringing the alarm about foreign interference in our elections, the President has refused to accept their conclusion that Russia interfered in the 2016 election. His refusal to ensure the integrity of our elections by leading on this issue from the White House sends the wrong message to our adversaries.

It also calls into question whether the many agencies working to defend our elections are getting the support and resources they need. I hope we can speak to that issue as well.

As I said at the outset, this Committee must take its responsibility to oversee the Department of Homeland Security seriously. The security of the homeland is at stake, and our constituents expect no less.

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