



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

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

The Dynamic Terrorism Landscape and What it Means for America

February 2, 2022

Today, the Committee is meeting to examine the dynamic terrorism threat landscape and discuss why the threat is dominated by domestic violent extremists, including white supremacists. Almost exactly one year ago, this Committee held its first hearing of the 117th Congress, examining the threat of domestic terrorism in the wake of the January 6th attack on the Capitol.

Since that hearing, I have taken on a new role — Chairman of the Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th attack — where I am working across the aisle to get the bottom of that attack. Here, on the Homeland Security Committee, our mandate is to carry out broader oversight to better understand what DHS, the FBI, and other federal agencies must do, together with their State and local and private sectors partners, to detect, prevent, and respond to terrorism.

Too often our public spaces are subject to shootings or hostage-taking or other violent plots that see grocery stores, schools, houses of worship, or concerts become crime scenes. In June of 2015, a young man sought refuge in a Charleston church, expressing what seemed to be genuine interest in their regular Bible study meeting. Motivated by a desire to start a race-fueled civil war, he opened fire, killing nine African American members of the Bible group that had just welcomed him. Since that tragic attack, there have been countless other acts of terrorism and violence carried out by people with a variety of extremist views.

The FBI Director testified before this Committee that last year that his agency had the largest number of open Domestic Terrorism cases ever. He went on to say that the majority of those cases involve white supremacist extremists. He also described how violent extremists are choosing aspects of different ideologies that fit their unique grievance, as if choosing individual items from a “salad bar.” The emergence of what the FBI has come to call “salad bar” ideologies is a paradigm shift in terrorism threats that has made it harder for law enforcement to prevent attacks. Over the past year, threats posed by converging violent ideologies have increased, as ideologies that once were thought of as “fringe” have become more mainstream.

I appreciate the steps DHS and others have taken over the past year to try to address this issue, especially after the previous Administration ignoring it for four years. Certainly, the issuance of the first ever “National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism” last June was an important step forward.

I also appreciate the work many in the private sector and civil society are doing to protect our communities and prevent the Internet from being used to spread disinformation, radicalize people, or plan attacks. But much more must be done, and we are eager to hear about potential solutions today.

We must be clear-eyed about the threat from violent extremists and focus our efforts on finding appropriate solutions that improve our homeland security and allow people to go about their lives. Just last month, a man flew from the U.K. to the United States and made his way to a synagogue in Texas — specifically targeting worshippers for their Jewish faith. He pretended to be a homeless man seeking

shelter and appealed to their humanity. Like we saw in 2015 at the Mother Emanuel Church in Charleston, the attacker preyed upon kindness of people of faith to carry out his attack. Thankfully, this time there was no loss of life.

Our job on this Committee is to focus on security and keep our fellow Americans safe. We must prioritize helping people congregate in a manner that allows at-risk communities to live their religious tenets and show kindness to those in need.

Today, we have a panel of expert witnesses that will outline the dynamic terrorism threat landscape we face and present their ideas about what we ought to do moving forward. I look forward to their testimony and responses to our questions so we can find a path to keep us all secure. American lives, our way of life, and our very democracy are at stake.

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