



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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

Worldwide Threats to the Homeland: 20 Years After 9/11

September 22, 2021

This month Americans observed the 20th anniversary of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. We will never forget the heroic first responders who ran into the Twin Towers to save others, the brave Flight 93 passengers who fought back against the hijackers, or the servicemembers killed at their posts in the Pentagon. We remember all those who lost their lives or their loved ones on 9/11, and those who have suffered Ground Zero-related health effects in the days since.

Stood up in the aftermath of the attacks, this Committee met earlier this month on hallowed ground in New York to mark the 20th anniversary. We visited the 9/11 Memorial & Museum and laid a wreath in remembrance. We met in One World Trade Center with first responders to discuss how far we have come in the last two decades and what more remains to be done to secure our Nation while upholding our American values.

Today, the Committee is meeting to examine “Worldwide Threats to the Homeland: 20 Years After 9/11.” It is the Committee’s longstanding practice to meet annually with national security leaders to discuss the global threat landscape and the U.S. response. This year especially, we reflect on the incredible transformation of our national security apparatus and expansion of the Homeland Security Enterprise over the last two decades.

We recognize the success we have had in preventing another 9/11-style attack, but are sobered by the challenges posed by longstanding and emerging homeland security threats. Some of these threats include the recent rise domestic terrorism; more frequent cyber attacks from increasingly sophisticated actors; and the security implications of the Taliban’s return to power in Afghanistan.

With respect to domestic terrorism, our witnesses have testified before this Committee previously about the grave nature of the threat – Secretary Mayorkas called it “the greatest threat in the homeland.” I hope to hear from the panel today about their current domestic terrorism threat assessment in the wake of the January 6th attack on the United States Capitol.

Regarding cybersecurity, over the past year we have seen our adversaries burrow into Federal networks through a sophisticated supply chain attack, exploit one day vulnerabilities in Microsoft Exchange Servers, and refuse to rein in cyber criminals working to extort millions of dollars from U.S. critical infrastructure owners and operators through ransomware attacks. I commend the Administration for its sustained commitment to securing Federal networks and making the Federal government a more valuable security partner to the private sector. We still have a long way to go, and I am interested to learn today about how DHS and FBI coordinate as they execute their shared cyber security missions.

Regarding Afghanistan, this Committee has been and will continue to be engaged on threats to the homeland emanating from Afghanistan, while recognizing that the terror threat has metastasized across

the world in the last two decades. We are conducting careful oversight of U.S. efforts to screen and resettle our Afghan allies in this country and will continue to do so.

Finally, I want to address the situation at the southern border. The Biden Administration inherited an immigration system badly broken by the previous administration. Trump's cruel policies led to families being separated and children dying in custody. Those immoral policies did not represent who we are as a people, and the Biden Administration was right to reject them. I have spoken to Secretary Mayorkas on a regular basis about the border, and even more frequently in recent days as events unfolded in Del Rio, Texas. The Administration has committed to enforcing the law and processing migrants in a safe, orderly, and humane manner, and this Committee will hold the Administration to its commitment.

Finally, I want to say a word to the men and women working to secure the homeland. Their jobs have never been easy, and they are particularly difficult right now, with the COVID-19 pandemic and worsening natural disasters caused by climate change threatening their health, disrupting travel, and diverting homeland security resources. Please know that this Committee greatly appreciates those working on the front lines and behind the scenes to secure the homeland on behalf of the American people.

As we learned on 9/11, nothing short of a well-coordinated, whole-of-government effort will protect the Nation against urgent, evolving threats. Twenty years on, the Committee on Homeland Security remains committed to working with Federal, State, and local partners on that critical effort.

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