

Opening Statement Ranking Member Brian Higgins (D-NY)

Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence

“Counterintelligence and Insider Threats: How Prepared is the Department of Homeland Security?”

Wednesday, July 13, 2016

Many of the issues that come before this committee are and have been mainstays in the public discourse since the terrorist attacks of September 11. However, the security clearance process and protection of our classified networks and information, arguably, did not become permanently affixed to our national and international security conversations until May 2013.

That is when we learned that former NSA contractor Edward Snowden leaked the details of classified programs to the British newspaper The Guardian. The sheer volume of information shared by Snowden brought many issues to the forefront of our security conversations.

Since the leak, Congress and the public have questioned if an outside contractor should have vetted his security clearance or if it was a duty that should have rested squarely in the hands of federal employees. We have questioned if Snowden should have had access to such sensitive information in massive volumes.

Then, later that same year, we learned the same firm that vetted Edward Snowden also vetted the Navy Yard shooter, Aaron Alexis. On September 16 2013, Alexis, a civilian contractor, opened fire at Navy Yard here in Washington, DC, literally within walking distance of where we sit today. In the subsequent investigation we learned that Alexis failed to disclose information about felony charges and a federal personnel report had no information about a his previous arrests.

In May of this year, Federal Protective Services employee Officer Tordil, who had held a TS/SCI clearance since November 2015, shot and killed his estranged wife outside of a high school in Maryland. Then, later killed two more people outside a mall and grocery store in Maryland. All of these instances have raised concerns that we will discuss today.

Had a strong Insider Threat program been in place, NSA authorities would have been alerted to massive amount of information being transferred by Snowden for public distribution. Continuous evaluations of Aaron Alexis may have flagged his arrests and felony charges.

While I understand the limitations of Insider Threat and Counterintelligence programs, I also see the value in having such programs. Today, I also look forward to expanding the conversation to consider the role ‘the right to privacy’ plays in these programs and securing the country.

Finding this balance is difficult, but today I hope to learn what the Department of Homeland Security is doing to advance their Insider Threat and Counterintelligence programs.