

Chairman Peters Opening Statement As Prepared for Delivery
Full Committee Hearing: Annual Threats
October 31, 2023

Today's hearing is an important opportunity to discuss the wide range of threats facing our nation. I'm grateful that our top national security and law enforcement officials are here this morning to provide critical updates about what their agencies are doing to address threats to our homeland security.

This year, this hearing comes a crucial moment. We are seeing a heightened threat environment in communities across the country in reaction to the ongoing conflict between Hamas and Israel. Many Americans are fearful that the increased tensions around that conflict could lead to violence in their communities here at home as incidents of anti-Semitic, anti-Arab, and anti-Muslim hate continue to grow.

Terrorism – and in particular domestic terrorism, fueled by white supremacist and anti-government ideologies – remains one of the most serious threats to our homeland security. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today about how their agencies are working to address both international and domestic terrorism.

Our nation also faces emerging threats from biological, chemical, nuclear, and radiological weapons – especially if those weapons fall into the wrong hands. I have long been concerned about the danger this poses – which is why I led the effort to re-authorize the Office of Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction, and will continue to work towards its passage. We must also re-authorize the Chemical Facility Anti-Terrorism Standards Program, and ensure that facilities that store or produce chemicals are secure from terrorist threats.

We'll also discuss the significant threat that cyber-attacks pose to our national and economic security. Bad actors such as foreign agents from China and Russia, cybercriminals, and so called "hacktivist" groups are constantly adapting – posing a serious risk to our critical infrastructure and our election security.

I am proud of the bipartisan work that this committee has done to strengthen American cybersecurity. Our bipartisan reforms are helping to protect schools, federal agencies, state and local governments, and other targets from cyber-attacks. That said, there is more that must be done to stop criminal hackers and foreign adversaries from exploiting network vulnerabilities, and I look forward to discussing those topics today.

The use of unmanned aircraft systems in our country has rapidly increased. While these tools help our economy and law enforcement personnel, they also bring serious security risks. Drones can threaten manned aircraft operations, target large public gatherings, and even be used to transport contraband across our borders.

I look forward to hearing what our witnesses have to say about the threat of unmanned aircraft systems, and the urgent need to re-authorize the counter-UAS capacities of the federal government, which are set to expire this November.

One of the most serious challenges we face – and one of the toughest to tackle – is that of climate change and natural disasters. This is an existential threat to our planet, and continues to affect our national security. As extreme weather events become more common, we have to spend more resources on disaster recovery. Climate change also poses direct threats to our security infrastructure – affecting ports, manufacturing facilities, transportation routes, and many other parts of our supply chains.

Today, we'll hear more about how our national security agencies are addressing climate change – and what else we must do to mitigate this threat.

Finally, this hearing presents a unique opportunity to discuss border security. We will learn more about the Administration's work to secure both our Northern and Southern borders, prevent human trafficking, and stop the flow of deadly drugs like fentanyl into our communities.

The full range of these threats – from terrorism, to drones, to a changing climate – pose great danger to our communities. Our panel of witnesses will provide an essential perspective. They will help us understand what our agencies are doing to mitigate these national security threats – and what more Congress and the Administration can do to keep Americans safe.