

Statement of Ranking Member Tom Carper: “Threats to the Homeland”
October 8, 2015

As prepared for delivery:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and welcome to our witnesses.

As this Committee has discussed at a number of hearings over the years, the threats our country faces have evolved significantly since 9/11.

After 9/11, the most acute terrorist threats came from Osama Bin Laden's Al-Qaeda. Today, Bin Laden is dead. The core of Al-Qaeda as we knew it has been dismantled.

Unfortunately, ISIS and Al-Qaeda's affiliates in Yemen and Syria have filled the void. The tactics they use have changed, as well. ISIS in particular has perfected using social media to spread its online propaganda and recruit members to its ranks. These new tactics mean that we can no longer rely solely on military force to eliminate a terrorist threat.

We must identify the root causes of why Westerners join the ranks of ISIS and tailor our counter terrorism tactics to meet this evolving challenge. That is no easy task. To do this, we will have to improve our ability to counter violent extremism. I know this is a priority for all of our witnesses, and I commend the Secretary for establishing a new office at the Department that will be focused countering violent extremism.

Moreover, if we are to be truly successful in countering ISIS's message, among other things, we must remind the world of the principals and values that the United States stands for. Our country has a long history of granting refuge to the war-weary. We have a moral obligation to continue this tradition by taking in our share of Syrian refugees.

With that said, we also have an obligation to ensure those people coming from Syria are thoroughly vetted in order to confirm that these people are who they say they are. It is our job—as well as the job of the witnesses testifying today—to strike an appropriate balance between these two competing interests. I hope we'll have a good conversation today about how we can do this.

But while we need to continue to focus on halting the kind of terrorist acts committed and inspired by groups like Al-Qaeda and ISIS, there are other threats that have grown and evolved since 9/11 that also demand our attention.

Fourteen years ago, hardly anyone was talking about 'cybersecurity.' Today, cyber intrusions are a daily occurrence. Some cyber actors want to steal our sensitive information. Others just want to be disruptive to make political points. Some nation states, however, have the capability to use a cyber attack as a tool for espionage or even as a weapon of war.

And the vulnerabilities that make these kinds of attacks possible also open the information systems that run our government, our businesses, and our critical infrastructure to cause wide-scale economic damage or even physical harm.

Last year, this committee laid an important foundation and passed four cybersecurity bills that became law. Now we must come together – Democrat and Republican, privacy advocate and industry – to move cyber legislation here in the Senate as soon as possible.

We should start with the bill that Chairman Johnson and I, as well as Senators Ayotte, McCaskill, Collins, and Warner worked on to significantly enhance the EINSTEIN program at DHS. The Senate also needs to take up the information sharing bill sponsored by Senators Burr and Feinstein and consider amendments to the bill.

As I think about how we are going to address all the threats that our nation faces – terrorism, cyber attacks, drug traffickers, and even mother nature at times – I am reminded of the lessons in courage and sacrifice that I learned on a recent trip.

A few weeks ago, on the 14th anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, I was honored to join Secretary Johnson and our Chairman in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, to visit the Flight 93 Memorial and commemorate the 40 passengers and crew who made the ultimate sacrifice for our country. Their story is a humble reminder of why we are all here today and the importance of the mission before us.

It is my hope that we will all remember the lessons that the passengers and crew of Flight 93 taught us about bravery and selflessness. And I hope we can use those lessons to make our country and the world a better, safer place.

Thank you again Mr. Secretary for that very special invitation.

I look forward to a productive hearing today.