

Chairman Peters Opening Statement As Prepared for Delivery
Full Committee Hearing: Examining the Role of the Department of Homeland Security's
Office of Intelligence and Analysis
May 18, 2021

Today, we will hear from former homeland security intelligence officials, as well as national security and civil rights experts, on their views of the appropriate roles, responsibilities, and authorities for the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Intelligence and Analysis.

I would like to thank each of our witnesses for joining us today, and for their work in the public and private sectors to protect the American people.

Today's testimony will give the Committee critical insight into how the Office of Intelligence and Analysis operates, and what role it should play in providing threat assessments and domestic terrorism intelligence to Department of Homeland Security leadership, state and local law enforcement partners, and other private entities.

We will also hear testimony on how to ensure citizens' fundamental civil rights and civil liberties are safeguarded as we work to better tackle a rising domestic terrorism threat.

Earlier this year, the Committee heard about how systematic breakdowns in planning and preparation led to a deadly attack on the U.S. Capitol, the heart of our democracy.

The Office of Intelligence and Analysis, along with other intelligence and counterterrorism agencies, failed to effectively identify the threat on January 6th.

We need to understand the factors that led to that failure, and what concrete steps can be taken to better understand the current threats we face, and ensure the Department of Homeland Security is effectively sharing that information with state and local law enforcement.

I appreciate the hard work and dedication of the national security experts in the Office of Intelligence and Analysis, and recognize they have faced challenges that must be addressed. However, it is apparent that the office must also do more to effectively counter the rising threats posed by white supremacist and anti-government violence that threaten communities across the country.

One of the greatest challenges the Office of Intelligence and Analysis has faced is the pressure to politicize domestic terrorism threats. Under the previous Administration, the office reportedly downplayed the threat posed by white supremacist and anti-government violence, and reportedly censored some intelligence information under pressure from President Trump.

At times, this political pressure led to problematic and inaccurate analysis related to peaceful protest movements, overstating the roles of certain groups, and even reportedly developing intelligence on American journalists.

Our national security and the safety of Americans cannot depend on political whims or individual leaders' biases.

That is why Congress must work to ensure that analysis conducted by the intelligence community is separated from the political environment, and based in facts and data that accurately assesses security threats.

The office also struggles with employee morale, a challenge identified in Government Accountability Office reports and employee surveys, possibly because of a lack of consistent leadership and direction.

Since this office was first created nineteen years ago, it has had more than a dozen different leaders. Only three of those individuals, including one of our witnesses today, led the office for more than two years.

These obstacles, and other challenges, must be addressed quickly. Our nation faces very real and deadly domestic terrorism threats, and our national security agencies must ensure our counterterrorism efforts and resources align with those threats.

A recent, long-delayed joint report from the FBI and DHS identified racially or ethnically motivated extremists, primarily white supremacists, as the most significant national security threat based on data from recent years.

While I appreciate the initial steps the Biden Administration has taken to begin addressing the alarming rise of these threats, its clear there is more work to do. American lives are at risk, and we must ensure we are taking all appropriate action to safeguard the American people, and protect their most fundamental rights.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses, who bring unique perspectives on how we can improve the Office of Intelligence and Analysis to meet our security goals.

I have no doubt, that this Committee can work in a nonpartisan way to strengthen our homeland security and protect Americans from all threats, foreign and domestic.