

Opening Statement
*Countering Terrorism in a Shifting Geopolitical
Landscape*

November 14, 2023

- Good afternoon to our panel of witnesses.
- Thank you for your willingness to help the subcommittees with our important work.
- Before I start, I would like to first personally thank my good friend Chairman Fitzpatrick and his staff, as well as Ranking Members Plaskett and Magaziner and their staff, for their cooperation and willingness to collaborate with us on this very critical hearing.
- Today's hearing will examine the security of our homeland during a shifting geopolitical landscape around the world, and in the Middle East.

- Both the subcommittees are seeking a better understanding of the current counterterrorism threat to Americans and interests in the homeland—whether foreign born, homegrown, or domestic—and your agency’s support to broader efforts to secure the homeland.
- We hope that our subcommittees will be better positioned to identify and fill gaps and vulnerabilities across the federal government for the purpose of protecting our homeland.
- This hearing is occurring in the wake of the Iran-backed Hamas terrorist attack on our ally Israel—less than 6 weeks ago.
- What we witnessed on the sorrowful morning of October 7th was undeniably brutal and horrific.
- It was the deadliest day since the creation of the State of Israel—75 years ago. It was also the deadliest day for the Jewish people since the Holocaust.

- Israelis, Americans, and other foreign nationals died, many were injured, and others continue to be held hostage or remain unaccounted for.
- There is no doubt that these attacks show that free nations remain vulnerable to heinous acts of terrorism.
- It also shows that this was an intelligence and security failure. If we and our allies were able to miss the October 7th attack, what else may have been missed?
- What do we know now about these terrorist groups? What does tomorrow look like?
- FBI Director Wray recently testified before the Senate that the terrorism threat has not only been elevated throughout this year, but the ongoing war in the Middle East has raised the threat of an attack against Americans in the homeland “to a whole other level.”

- Following Hamas's terrorist attack against Israel, several foreign terrorist organizations have repeatedly called for attacks against Americans and U.S. interests, raising the potential for terrorist activity on U.S. soil.
- We are already seeing this with the individual who was arrested in Houston, Texas studying how to build explosives and posting online about his support for killing Jews.
- It was not that long ago when our nation experienced our own heartbreaking events on 9/11.
- The horrific terror attacks that took place that day is why the House Committee on Homeland Security was created and it forever changed how our nation views threats abroad.
- Our nation has experienced highs and lows in eradicating the evil that permeates from terror

networks. However, the grim reality is that these groups are rearming and reemerging in places that span across regions from Africa to Afghanistan.

- Their hateful rhetoric and influence is spreading like cancer across the globe due to the accessibility of online platforms.
- It is critical that our priorities are well-placed to address the security threats to Americans and our national security interests.
- We must be aware of the rise of extremism in the West and actively work with our partners and allies to identify and counter these threats.
- As members of each of our respected committees, we must work to ensure that our nation's intelligence enterprise is disseminating accurate and timely information to federal, state,

local, tribal, and territorial law enforcement agencies.

- Specifically, we need to streamline the processes and systems at our air, land, and sea points of entries that are screening individuals entering our country to keep individuals on the terror watchlist from entering the homeland.
- ***It is concerning*** that earlier this year, a group of individuals from Uzbekistan and additional countries sought asylum at the Southwest border and were granted entry into the United States after they were screened by DHS.
- Initial screenings did not uncover their smuggler's connection to ISIS at the time. Subsequently, the FBI learned about a human smuggling network with connections to ISIS that helped the Uzbek and other nationals travel to the United States.

- We should all be concerned about the security of our Southwest border.
- Our nation has seen a record number of individuals encountered who have either appeared on the Known or Suspected Terrorist watch list or individuals designated as a Special Interest Alien (SIA).
 - According to CBP data, 169 terrorist suspects have been encountered in FY 2023, which marks a 1,026% increase since FY 2021.
 - From October 2021 through October 2023, CBP encountered over 6,000 SIAs from Afghanistan, 1,600 from Pakistan, 659 from Iran, and 123 from Iraq between ports of entry.
- Additionally, we know that the Iranian regime has tried to exploit weaknesses in our Southwest border. Surely, there is a risk that terrorists,

including those backed by the Iranian regime, could take advantage of our vulnerabilities, and conduct attacks in the homeland.

- Neglecting to address our security posture at our Southwest border with vigilance will result in inevitable consequences.
- We must also be cognizant that authoritarian regimes, like China and Russia, are utilizing all of the tools at their disposal to advance their strategic goals throughout the world by catering to those who echo the scripted messages that originate from the Iranian regime and its surrogates.
- Our nation must show strong leadership in the face of aggression and unapologetically stand with our allies who share our values and our committed to our unified counterterrorism mission.

- There is no greater sign of how cross-cutting this issue is than the fact that the Counterterrorism, Law Enforcement, and Intelligence Subcommittee is joined today by the National Intelligence Enterprise Subcommittee.
- Recognizing the problem's size, scale, and pace, we are here today tackling this issue together, because that is exactly what will be necessary.
- Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you, again, for your courtesy in holding this important hearing with me, and with that, I yield back.