

FBI director has been sounding alarm on 'heightened threat environment': Is America listening?

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Whether it's terrorism, China, or an insecure border, the U.S. faces a litany of threats both internally and internationally, according to the FBI.

FBI Director Christopher Wray has repeatedly warned of a "heightened threat environment," and has pleaded with lawmakers to take each one seriously.

Connecting all of these disparate threats is the FBI's ability to adequately address them. At a House Appropriations Subcommittee earlier this month, Wray said the FBI's fiscal year 2024 budget was around \$500 million below what the bureau needed to sustain its 2023 efforts.



Federal Bureau of Investigation Director Christopher Wray testifies at a House Appropriations Committee hearing on April 11, 2024 on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. (Julia Nihkinson/Getty Images)

Wray said the budget shortfall "could not have come at a worse time" given that the U.S., according to the bureau, is in a "heightened threat environment."

"As I look back over my career in law enforcement, I would be hard-pressed to think of a time where so many threats to public safety and national security were so elevated all at once, but that is the case as I sit here today," Wray told House lawmakers.

His comments came days before the House passed a \$95 billion aid package in military aid for Ukraine and Israel.

"After Oct. 7 is when we went to a whole other level."

— FBI Director Christopher Wray

Here is an assessment from the FBI Director of some of the top threats the U.S. faces in the coming months and years.

CHINA

Of all the threats the U.S. faces, the FBI has signaled that China far outweighs them all. According to Wray, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has built up a vast cybersecurity and counterintelligence apparatus devoted to theft of intellectual property and criminality.

Wray spoke about the threat posed by China during a summit on Modern Conflict and Emerging Threats at Vanderbilt University last week.

China's hacking program, Wray said, was larger than that of every other major nation combined – and that's only magnified by the PRC's military and growing use of artificial intelligence.

"You could close your eyes and pull an industry or sector out of a hat and, chances are, Beijing has targeted it."

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To give a sense of the scope of the PRC's operations, Wray said that even if the bureau's top cyber agents and cyber intelligence

analysts were focused solely on China – and not on ransomware, Iran, or Russia – "Chinese hackers would still (conservatively) outnumber FBI cyber personnel by at least 50 to 1."

He said Beijing has hit just about every American industry – whether it be biotech, aviation, AI, health, or agriculture – to steal U.S. intellectual property.

CHINA SPENDING 'DRASTICALLY MORE' ON MILITARY THAN DECLARED, US ADMIRAL SAYS

"You could close your eyes and pull an industry or sector out of a hat and, chances are, Beijing has targeted it," Wray said. "The PRC is engaged in the largest and most sophisticated theft of intellectual property and expertise in the history of the world, leveraging its most powerful weapons, starting with cyber."

Wray previously told lawmakers that there has been far too little public focus on the fact that PRC hackers are targeting the U.S.' critical infrastructure "in preparation to wreak havoc and cause real-world harm to American citizens and communities."



Chinese President Xi Jinping adjusts his jacket as he stands to sing the national anthem at the closing session of the National People's Congress held at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, Monday, March 11, 2024. (AP Photo/Ng Han Guan)

China's malign efforts, Wray said, are driven largely by the Chinese Communist Party's "aspirations to wealth and power," as it seeks to seize economic development in the areas most critical to tomorrow's economy.

Compounding these threats is China's long-term goal to retake Taiwan. Per Wray, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence last year assessed that Beijing was building out its capability to deter U.S. intervention in a potential crisis between China and Taiwan by 2027.

Wray warned in January that the PRC had "circled" the year 2027 on its calendar and will "be on us before you know it."

GERMAN LAWMAKER'S AIDE ARRESTED ON SUSPICION OF SPYING FOR CHINA IN EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

"I do want the American people to know that we cannot afford to sleep on this danger. As a government and a society, we've got to remain vigilant and actively defend against the threat that Beijing poses," Wray said in January. "Otherwise, China has shown it will make us pay."



Experts weighed American and Chinese military and civil investments in artificial intelligence and while some believe the U.S. has a slight advantage in developing the technology currently, others worry China has already surpassed U.S. capability (Getty Images)

At that same hearing, Wray called China's "multi-pronged assault" on our national and economic security "the defining threat of our generation."

BORDER

Securing the border remains a top issue for American voters, particularly amid the rise of suspects on the terrorist watch list as well as the proliferation of deadly fentanyl into communities nationwide.

Wray told lawmakers at a House Appropriations Subcommittee on April 11 that the bureau continues to see drug cartels pushing

"fentanyl and other dangerous drugs into every corner of the country."

"Let's not forget that it didn't take a big number of people on 9/11 to kill 3,000 people."

— FBI Director Christopher Wray

He noted at Vanderbilt University last week that many of fentanyl's precursor chemicals that end up in our communities "are coming out of China."

At a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing in December, Wray said the bureau had seized enough fentanyl to kill 270 million people.

SENATE WON'T PASS BORDER SECURITY LEGISLATION THIS YEAR, JOHNSON'S OFFICE SUGGESTS

"That's about 80% of all Americans," Wray said. "We're also focused on other threats that emanate from the border and impact communities all over the country, things like violent gangs and human traffickers."

At the same hearing, Wray said terrorists' ability to "exploit any port of entry, including our Southwest border, is a source of concern."



This image shows migrants moving near the U.S. southern border in New Mexico. (Fox News Digital)

"There's a lot of discussion about numbers – and numbers are important – but let's not forget that it didn't take a big number of people on 9/11 to kill 3,000 people," he said, noting that the bureau has seen an increase in "suspected terrorists attempting to cross (the border) over the last five years."



A group of over 100 migrants attempting to enter the US illegally rush a border wall Thursday, March 21, 2024. In the process the migrants knock down Texas National Guardsmen before they are halted by the border wall. (James Breeden for New York Post / Mega)

Asked by Sen. Lindsay Graham, R-S.C., in December whether the U.S. was seeing the largest terrorist threat since 9/11, Wray said the threat was "higher than it's been in a long, long time."

"I see blinking lights everywhere I turn," Wray told Graham.

TERRORISM

Wray said earlier this month that the U.S. was at a "heightened threat level" of terrorism even before Oct. 7, 2023, when Hamas

militants stormed into Israel, killing 1,200 people and taking around 250 hostages.

"After Oct. 7 is when we went to a whole other level," Wray told the House Appropriations Subcommittee on April 11.



Hezbollah members salute and raise the group's yellow flags during the funeral of fallen fighters who were killed in an Israeli strike on their vehicles, in Shehabiya in south Lebanon on April 17. (AFP via Getty Images)

Wray said the FBI has seen a "rogue's gallery of foreign terrorist organizations calling for attacks on us."

HEZBOLLAH CLAIMS TO SHOOT DOWN ISRAELI DRONE OVER LEBANON

This includes Hezbollah in Lebanon praising Hamas and threatening to attack U.S. interests in the region. It includes Al Qaeda issuing its most "specific call for an attack" on the U.S. in the past half-decade.

AQAP, which is Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, as well as ISIS have called for jihadists to attack Americans and Jewish communities in the U.S. In Afghanistan, home to Al Qaeda and ISIS-K, the U.S. has lost some of its intelligence gathering capabilities following the chaotic withdrawal of U.S.



A masked Islamic State soldier poses holding the ISIS flag. (Pictures from History/Universal Images Group via Getty Images)

Wray also pointed to the growth of other terrorist groups in Africa like Al Shabab – the best funded branch of Al Qaeda – as well as ISIS's attempt to "free some very dangerous fighters" in Syria.

Wray said these terrorist groups typically don't see eye to eye, but are united in one thing: calling for attacks on the U.S.

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"When organizations like Al Qaeda, like ISIS, express an intent to conduct attacks against us, it is something we need to take very seriously," Wray said. "And so, that's part of why I've highlighted this as a heightened threat."

Bradford Betz is a Fox News Digital breaking reporter covering crime, political issues, and much more.

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