

Homeland Security Committee Hearing, November 28, 2017

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The New Jersey State Police (NJSP) is comprised of four primary Branches: Administration, Investigations, Homeland Security, and Operations. Through these Branches and other specialized Offices, the Division maintains a network of information sharing and collaborative efforts to conduct effective operations. The members within these groups also maintain critical relations with outside agencies to promote abilities to counter terrorist and criminal activities in numerous critical infrastructure sectors and countless soft targets.

Presidential Policy Directive 8: National Preparedness (PPD-8) describes the Nation's approach to preparing for the threats and hazards that pose the greatest risk to the security of the United States. National preparedness is defined as the actions taken to plan, organize, equip, train and exercise to build and sustain capabilities necessary to prevent, protect against, mitigate the effects of, respond to and recover from those threats that pose the greatest risk to the Nation. Through the guidance of PPD-8 frameworks, consideration must be given to enhancing and fortifying capabilities in preventing, detecting and deterring of threats and attacks within the State of New Jersey.

The threat of terrorism and acts of violent crime has become too common in the United States. The New Jersey State Police assumes a great duty in defending the State against terrorist attacks and violent crimes. Preparedness is a shared responsibility and requires a whole community effort to promote safety and resilience through a common goal. It is vital that all partners build, organize and enhance capabilities in a unified approach to be better prepared to counter all-hazards threats in our communities. A mission within the Division of State Police is to develop innovative strategies and partnerships with public and private entities to prevent, interdict, protect and respond to threats that target our State. Through communal target hardening coordination, protective measure consultation, infrastructure and event vulnerability assessments, real time data analysis and situational awareness tracking, interagency communication, and direct counter-threat operational deployments, our goal is to thwart terror.

The Office of Target Hardening was established in the Special Operations Section within the Homeland Security Branch in July of 2016. Their primary mission is to effectively implement and develop target hardening strategies to deter terrorist activity. This Office works collaboratively with other specialized groups within the Division as well as with other federal, state, county and local mission partners. This is demonstrated in the monthly meeting at the Regional Operations Intelligence Center (ROIC) where mission partner representatives assemble to discuss new intelligence, special events, current threats, lessons learned, best practices, and operational recommendations. These partners include, but are not limited to: the NJSP Threat Analysis and Critical Infrastructure Units, Joint Terrorism Task Force, Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Transportation Security Administration, New Jersey Office of Emergency Management, and National Counterterrorism Center.

These daily-weekly-monthly discussions are our “cycle of preparedness” where we, as a team of teams, auto-adapt to the evolving threat through collaboration, information sharing, intelligence, prevention, awareness and response. The Division of State Police deploys target hardening missions regularly due to the shared network from mission partners. The Office of Target Hardening organizes and directs NJSP units, which specialize in explosive and hazardous materials detection, suspicious activity detection and interception, counter assault tactics, maritime security, commercial motor vehicle and motor coach safety, aviation surveillance and insertion operations, and highway transportation systems resiliency, into targeted areas. This Office also deconflicts with other agencies and specialized units in order to conduct safe, coordinated prevention and protection based operations.

Today’s threat environment domestically and internationally is wrought with an ideology committed to the destruction of established Western Culture. The world has seen a significant spike in foreign and domestic terrorist attacks resulting in death, destruction, intimidation and fear. The United States is the “ultimate prize” for those seeking to strike a blow to our way of living. This ideology is evident by the rise in Homegrown Violent Extremist (HVE) attacks, utilizing both complex and rudimentary means. As a State, we witnessed and responded to these type of attacks during the September 2016 New Jersey and New York Bombings. The terrorist threats we face are only limited by the creativity and sense of purpose of those planning and executing them. In addition, law enforcement officers and military personnel have become a preferred target for those seeking to do harm.

In order to be able to continue to detect, deter, prevent and respond to terrorist and criminal activities, our law enforcement must continue to develop its capabilities. Collaboration and information sharing are most vital pieces that need to be nurtured in order to sustain strong relations. Stakeholders need to be able to train, equip and exercise personnel as well as provide routine education to develop decision making abilities. Our “first preventers” should be prepared with the institutional knowledge of the threats and practices in order to mitigate radicalization and mobilization phases before our men and women in blue encounter them as “first responders”. Counterterrorism and target hardening operations need effective means of communications and plans that are interoperable and standardized. The State of New Jersey lacks digital technologies and personnel to support planning and operational phases and in providing consistent real time, interagency communications during a multi-agency response to an incident or event. We collectively must continue to foster sustainable relationships, enable efficient information exchange, and implement an integration and analysis function to inform planning and operational decisions in order to protect our citizens and critical infrastructure in a unified approach.