



Department of Justice

STATEMENT OF

**JILL SANBORN
EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
NATIONAL SECURITY BRANCH
FEDERAL BUREAU OF
INVESTIGATION**

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, JUSTICE, SCIENCE
AND RELATED AGENCIES**

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

AT A HEARING ENTITLED

**“VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND DOMESTIC TERRORISM IN AMERICA:
THE ROLE AND RESPONSE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE”**

PRESENTED

APRIL 29, 2021

**JILL SANBORN
EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, NATIONAL SECURITY BRANCH
FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION
STATEMENT BEFORE THE HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE,
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WASHINGTON, D.C.**

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Good morning Chairman Cartwright, Ranking Member Aderholt and members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the FBI's role in combatting Domestic Terrorism. I am pleased to be here representing the dedicated men and women of the FBI's Counterterrorism Division.

As has been stated multiple times before, preventing terrorist attacks, from any place, by any actor, remains the FBI's top priority. The nature of the threat posed by terrorism—both international terrorism (IT) and domestic terrorism (DT)—continues to evolve.

It is not possible to discuss the evolving domestic terrorism threat in the United States today without examining the January 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol. To be clear, the violence and destruction of property at the U.S. Capitol building on January 6 showed a blatant and appalling disregard for our institutions of government and the orderly administration of the democratic process. The FBI has deployed the full force of our investigative resources and is working closely with our federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial partners to aggressively pursue those involved in the violent siege of the Capitol Complex on January 6, 2021. FBI special agents, intelligence analysts, and professional staff have been hard at work gathering evidence, sharing intelligence, and working with federal prosecutors to bring charges against the individuals involved.

In 2020, the FBI assessed the greatest terrorism threat to the United States was from lone actors or small cells who typically radicalize online and look to attack soft targets with easily accessible weapons; we remain confident in that assessment today. We see these threats manifested within both Domestic Violent Extremists (DVEs) and Homegrown Violent Extremists (HVEs), two distinct threats, both of which are located primarily in the United States and most frequently radicalize and mobilize to violence on their own. Individuals who commit violent criminal acts in furtherance of social or political goals stemming from domestic influences—some of which include racial or ethnic bias, or anti-government or anti-authority sentiments—are described as DVEs, whereas HVEs are individuals who are inspired primarily by global jihad, but not receiving individualized direction from Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs) .

Both Domestic and Homegrown Violent Extremists are often motivated and inspired by a mix of sociopolitical, ideological, and personal grievances against their targets, and more recently have focused on soft targets to include civilians, members of law enforcement and the military, symbols or members of the U.S. government, houses of worship, retail locations, and mass public gatherings. Selecting these types of accessible targets, in addition to the insular nature of their radicalization and mobilization to violence and limited discussions with others regarding their plans, challenges law enforcement to detect and disrupt the activities of lone actors before they occur.

DVEs pose a steady and evolving threat of violence and economic harm to the United States. Trends may shift, but the underlying drivers for domestic violent extremism—which includes socio-political conditions, racism, and anti-Semitism, just to name a few—remain constant. As stated above, the FBI is most concerned about lone offender attacks; primarily shootings, as they have served as the dominant lethal mode for domestic violent extremist attacks. More deaths were caused by domestic violent extremists than international terrorists in recent years. In fact, 2019 was the deadliest year for domestic violent extremism since the Oklahoma City Bombing in 1995; a tragic note on the state of domestic terrorism as we look back and remember the victims and their families, with last week marking 26 years since that horrific attack.

The top threat we face from DVEs continues to be those we categorize as Racially or Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremists (RMVEs), specifically those who advocate for the superiority of the white race, and who were the primary source of fatalities perpetrated by DVEs in 2018 and 2019. It is important to note that we have recently seen an increase in fatal DVE attacks perpetrated by Anti-Government or Anti-Authority Violent Extremists, specifically Militia Violent Extremists and Anarchist Violent Extremists, over the last year. Anti-Government or Anti-Authority Violent Extremists were responsible for three of the four fatal DVE attacks in 2020. Also, in 2020, we saw the first fatal attack committed by an Anarchist Violent Extremist in over 20 years.

Consistent with our mission, the FBI does not investigate First Amendment-protected speech or association, peaceful protests, or political activity. The FBI holds sacred the rights of individuals to peacefully exercise their First Amendment freedoms. Non-violent protests are signs of a healthy democracy, not an ailing one. Regardless of their specific ideology, the FBI will aggressively pursue those who seek to hijack legitimate First Amendment-protected activity by engaging in violent criminal activity such as the destruction of property and violent assaults on law enforcement officers that we witnessed on January 6 and during lawful protests throughout the United States during the summer of 2020. We will actively pursue the opening of FBI investigations when an individual uses, or threatens the use of, force, violence, or coercion, in violation of federal law and in the furtherance of a social or political goals. But the FBI will aggressively pursue those who engage in violent criminal activity carried out under the guise of a protest, such as the violent assaults on law enforcement officers, threats to Members of Congress and their staffs, and destruction of property that we witnessed on January 6.

The FBI assesses HVEs are the greatest, most immediate IT threat to the United States. As described above, HVEs are located in and radicalized primarily in the United States, and do not receive individualized direction from global jihad-inspired foreign terrorist groups FTOs, but rather are inspired largely by the Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham (ISIS) and al-Qa'ida to commit violence. An HVE's lack of a direct connection with a foreign terrorist groups, ability to rapidly mobilize without detection, and use of encrypted communications pose significant challenges to our ability to proactively identify and disrupt them.

The FBI remains concerned that foreign terrorist groups, such as ISIS and al-Qa'ida, intend to carry out or inspire large-scale attacks in the United States. Despite their loss of physical territory in Iraq and Syria, ISIS remains relentless in its campaign of violence against the United States and our partners, both here at home and overseas. To this day, ISIS continues to aggressively promote its hate-fueled rhetoric and attract like-minded violent extremists with a willingness to conduct attacks against the United States and our interests abroad. ISIS' successful use of social media and online messaging applications to attract individuals seeking a sense of belonging is of continued concern to us. Like other foreign terrorist groups, ISIS advocates for lone offender attacks in the United States and Western countries via videos and other high-quality English language propaganda that have at times specifically advocated for attacks against civilians, the military, law enforcement, and other intelligence community personnel.

The al-Qa'ida threat today is relentless, but different, as was demonstrated by the attack at Naval Air Station Pensacola in December 2019. Due to the impressive technical and analytical work of our teams, we now know the shooter had conversations with overseas al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) associates in the months leading up to his attack, during which they discussed plans and how to carry them out, right up until the night before he carried out the murders. It is clear al-Qa'ida maintains its desire to both conduct and inspire large-scale, spectacular attacks. Because continued pressure has degraded some of the group's senior leadership, in the near term, we assess al-Qa'ida is more likely to continue to focus on cultivating its international affiliates and supporting small-scale, readily achievable attacks in regions such as East and West Africa.. Over the past year, propaganda from al-Qa'ida leaders sought to inspire individuals to conduct their own attacks in the United States and other Western nations.

Iran and its global proxies, including Iraqi Shia militant groups, continue to attack and plot against the United States and our allies throughout the Middle East in response to U.S. presence and pressure. Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Qods Force (IRGC-QF) continues to provide support to militant resistance groups and terrorist organizations. Iran also continues to support Lebanese Hizballah and other terrorist groups. Lebanese Hizballah has sent operatives to build terrorist infrastructures worldwide. The arrests of individuals in the United States allegedly linked to Lebanese Hizballah's main overseas terrorist arm, and their intelligence collection and procurement efforts, demonstrate Lebanese Hizballah's interest in long-term contingency planning activities here in the United States. Lebanese Hizballah Secretary-General Hasan

Nasrallah also has threatened retaliation for the death of IRGC-QF Commander Qassem Soleimani.

As an organization, we continually adapt and rely heavily on the strength of our federal, state, local, tribal, territorial, and international partnerships to combat all terrorist threats to the United States and our interests around the world. To that end, we use all available lawful investigative techniques and methods to combat these threats while continuing to collect, analyze, and share intelligence concerning the threat posed by violent extremists, in all their forms, who desire to harm Americans and US interests. We will continue to share information and encourage the sharing of information among our numerous partners via our Joint Terrorism Task Forces across the country, and our legal attaché offices around the world.

Conclusion

Looking forward, the FBI assesses DVEs pose an elevated threat of violence to the United States, and that some of these actors have been emboldened in the aftermath of the breach of the US Capitol. We expect Racially or Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremists, Anti-Government or Anti-Authority Violent Extremists, and other DVEs citing partisan political grievances will very likely pose the greatest domestic terrorism threats in 2021 and likely into 2022. The FBI urges federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial government counterterrorism and law enforcement officials and private sector partners, and the American public, to remain vigilant in light of the persistent threat posed by DVEs and their unpredictable target selection in order to effectively detect, prevent, preempt, or respond to domestic violent extremist threats and terrorist attacks in the United States.

The work being done by the FBI is immeasurable; however, we cannot afford to be complacent. We must continually seek out new technologies and solutions for the problems that exist today, as well as those that are on the horizon. We must build toward the future so that we are prepared to deal with the threats we will face at home and abroad and understand how those threats may be connected. To that end, we gather intelligence, consistent with our authorities, to help us understand and prioritize identified threats and to determine where there are gaps. We must stay ahead of the threats we face, working with our partners to try to fill gaps and continuing to learn as much as we can about the threats we face today, and those we may face tomorrow.

The expectation to respond to a wide range of complex and ever-changing threats is not new to the FBI. Our success in meeting these challenges is, however, directly tied to the resources provided to the FBI. The resources this committee provides each year are critical to the FBI's ability to address existing and emerging national security threats, including those outlined today.

Chairman Cartwright, Ranking Member Aderholt, and members of the Subcommittee, I would like to close by thanking you for this opportunity to discuss the threat posed by domestic terrorism. We are grateful for the leadership that you and this Subcommittee have provided to the

FBI. We would not possess the capabilities to deal with these threats and challenges today without your support. Your willingness to invest in and support our workforce and our physical and technical infrastructure allows the men and women of the FBI to make a difference every day in communities large and small throughout our nation and around the world. We thank you for that support.

I look forward to answering any questions you may have.