



Written Testimony of

Sean Haglund

Associate Director, Office for Bombing Prevention

Infrastructure Security Division

Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency

Department of Homeland Security

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Threats Against HBCUs, Minority Communities, the Rise in Hate Crimes and

what the Federal Government is Doing About it

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Overview of Terrorism and Targeted Violence

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS or the Department) confronts a wide array of threats on behalf of the American people. These threats endanger our communities and our way of life, and include terrorism perpetrated by both foreign and domestic actors. Targeted violence and terrorist threats to the United States have evolved and become more varied since the attacks on September 11, 2001. Combating these threats is, and will remain, a top priority for DHS.

In the years immediately following 9/11, we focused on foreign terrorists who sought to harm us within our borders and threaten our interests and assets abroad. In partnership with federal agencies spanning the law enforcement, counterterrorism, and intelligence communities, DHS built a multi-layered screening and vetting architecture to prevent certain individuals from traveling to or entering our country by air, land, or sea. We also issued a call for vigilance on the part of local communities and individuals alike.

Following 9/11, terrorism-related threats to the homeland evolved to include homegrown violent extremists (HVEs) – individuals operating primarily in the United States who advocate, engage in, or prepare to engage in ideologically-motivated terrorist activities in furtherance of political or social objectives promoted by a foreign terrorist organization, but are acting independent of direction by foreign terrorist groups. According to a joint DHS, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) assessment, from 2015 to 2017, HVEs became the most prominent terrorism-related threat to the homeland. In response, DHS partnered with law enforcement, first responders, social workers, mental health experts, and local communities to identify possible signs of radicalization to violence and to prevent violence before it occurred. Likewise, through close collaboration with our federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial (SLTT) partners, we strengthened our capacity within the United States to identify and share threat information among all levels of government, with the private sector, and with our foreign counterparts. We are leveraging the infrastructure, processes, and partnerships that grew out of 9/11, and applying those capabilities, and the lessons learned over the past 20 years, to the diverse set of threats we face today.

Terrorism-related threats to the United States continue to evolve. U.S.-based lone actors and small groups of individuals, including both HVEs and domestic violent extremists (DVEs), represent the most significant and persistent threat to our country.

Domestic Violent Extremism

DVE refers to individuals or movements based and operating primarily within the United States who seek to further political or social goals through unlawful acts of force or violence, without direction or inspiration from a foreign terrorist group or other foreign power. DVEs are motivated by various factors, including personal grievances, racial bias, perceived government overreach, conspiracy theories promoting violence, and unsubstantiated and false narratives about fraud in the 2020 presidential election. The mere advocacy of political or social positions, political activism, use of strong rhetoric, or even generalized advocacy for violent tactics and is, in general, constitutionally protected speech. DVEs can fit within one or multiple categories of ideological motivation or grievances.

The Intelligence Community (IC) has assessed that DVEs who are motivated by a range of ideologies and galvanized by recent political and societal events in the United States pose an elevated threat to the United States. This assessment is based on a joint report in March 2021 from DHS, the FBI, and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence titled, *Domestic Violent Extremism Poses Heightened Threat in 2021*. The IC assesses that racially or ethnically motivated violent extremists (RMVEs), including those who advocate for the superiority of the white race, and militia violent extremists (MVEs) present the most lethal DVE threats, with RMVEs more likely to conduct mass-casualty attacks against civilians and MVEs typically targeting law enforcement, elected officials, and government personnel and facilities.

These DVEs are typically fueled by violent extremist rhetoric and other grievances, stoked by false narratives and conspiracy theories promoting violence, often spread through social media and other online platforms by a broad range of domestic actors, and occasionally amplified by foreign threat actors. Merely posting, quoting, or interacting with such online content is protected by the First Amendment and does not indicate an association with, or make an individual, a DVE or a foreign threat actor. DVEs exploit a variety of popular social media platforms, smaller websites with targeted audiences, and encrypted chat applications to recruit new adherents, plan and rally support for in-person actions, and disseminate materials that contribute to radicalization, inspiration, and mobilization to violence. DVE lone offenders and small groups will continue to pose significant detection and disruption challenges because of their ability to mobilize discreetly and independently and to access weapons. The lethality of this threat is evidenced by recent attacks across the United States, including attacks against minority groups, government personnel and facilities, and critical infrastructure.

National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism

Enhancing our collective ability to prevent all forms of terrorism and targeted violence that threaten homeland security is a top priority for the Biden-Harris Administration and for DHS specifically. In January of 2021, President Biden directed his national security team to lead a comprehensive review of U.S. Government efforts to address domestic terrorism. As a result of that review, the Biden Administration released the first *National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism* to address this challenge to America's national security and improve the federal government's response.

For the first time ever, we have a strategy that provides a nationwide framework for the U.S. Government to understand and share domestic terrorism-related information; prevent domestic terrorism recruitment and mobilization to violence; disrupt and deter domestic terrorism activity; and confront long-term contributors to domestic terrorism, while embracing the protection of privacy, civil rights, and civil liberties as a national security imperative. DHS worked closely with the White House and our federal interagency partners in the development of the strategy, and will continue to work closely with these partners, as well as our federal, SLTT and non-governmental partners as we support its implementation.

In implementing this strategy, we will remain focused on reducing the threat of violence. We must make it harder to carry out an attack and reduce the potential for loss of life by

preventing radicalization and mobilization to violence. We recognize that DHS cannot do this alone. Therefore, the Department is embracing a whole-of-society approach to combating domestic terrorism by building trust, partnerships, and collaboration across every level of government, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, and the communities we serve, while vigilantly safeguarding the rights guaranteed under the First Amendment. We are taking a number of steps to expand our focus on this threat while ensuring that all available resources are devoted to combating domestic terrorism. These include:

- Enhancing efforts focused on the prevention of terrorism and targeted violence, including the identification and mitigation of violence through community-based prevention programs;
- Expanding intelligence analysis, production, and sharing, particularly with SLTT partners;
- Prioritizing partnerships with the federal interagency, as well as SLTT and non-governmental partners—including academia, faith-based organizations, and technology and social media companies—to support our efforts to identify and combat violent extremism; and,
- Ensuring that our approach to combating terrorism and targeted violence is consistent with our core values, which include the protection of individuals' privacy, civil rights, and civil liberties.

Threats to Public Gatherings and Crowded Places

Public gatherings and crowded places are increasingly vulnerable to acts of terrorism and targeted violence because of their relative accessibility and large number of potential targets. Organizations of all types and sizes, including businesses, critical infrastructure owners and operators, schools, and houses of worship face a variety of security risks. DHS is specifically concerned about increased targeting of the African American community, houses of worship, and educational institutions. Since early January 2022, U.S. law enforcement agencies witnessed a marked escalation in the number of bomb threats directed against historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) across the country, resulting in campus evacuations and lockdowns. From January 4 to February 25, the FBI identified threats to more than 50 institutions across 31 field offices with some receiving multiple threats in a single week..

These recent incidents reflect the use of bombs and other explosive devices as an enduring tactic intended to threaten and intimidate a specific population or group, and recent data reveal that improvised explosive device (IED)-related incidents in the U.S. are increasing. For example, the U.S. experienced a 71% increase in domestic bombing incidents in 2020 (428) over 2019 (251) and nearly 56% increase in overall explosion incidents since 2015.

The highest profile of these recent incidents, the 2020 Nashville bombing, was the first major vehicle-borne IED (VBIED) since the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, and the fourth largest in U.S. history. Though the bomber's intent was assessed to be an intentional act to end his own life, the timing and location was chosen to be impactful. The incident highlights that use of IEDs, regardless of motive, poses risk to soft targets and that unaddressed critical infrastructure vulnerabilities can have far-reaching consequences. In this case, the attack damaged more than 65 buildings in downtown Nashville. In particular, significant damage to

Communications Sector critical infrastructure adjacent to the blast site ultimately resulted in cellular, landline, and broadband telecommunications disruptions throughout the region, including customers in Alabama, Tennessee, and Kentucky; numerous 9-1-1 dispatch centers; and the Nashville International Airport. As a result of these disruptions, the FAA temporarily halted outgoing flights through the early evening of December 25, 2020.

The 2020 Nashville bombing also encapsulates the challenges of detecting and disrupting potential plots, responding to sophisticated IEDs, and protecting critical infrastructure. According to the 2020 *DHS National Preparedness Report*, “Regarding human-caused threats, communities most frequently identified explosive devices and cyberattacks as the most challenging threats to their capabilities.” State and local communities comprise the front lines for preventing or responding to IED threats, but face challenges building and sustaining needed capabilities. Recent bomb threats targeting HBCUs, as well as other higher education institutions and faith-based communities, further demonstrate how all types of IED incidents cause fear, disrupt operations, and strain limited first-responder resources.

DHS Efforts to Mitigate Bomb Threats and Protect HBCUs

DHS remains focused on enhancing the nation’s ability to prevent, protect against, respond to, and mitigate the use of explosives, including threats to the private sector; federal and SLTT entities; and critical infrastructure, including educational institutions. The Department’s Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) Office for Bombing Prevention (OBP) leads these efforts, and ensures that these institutions have the information, training, and tools necessary to mitigate potential risks and effectively respond to any threats. OBP’s primary mission is to protect critical infrastructure by building capabilities within the general public and across the public and private sectors to prevent, protect against, respond to, and mitigate bombing incidents. OBP accomplishes this mission through a focused portfolio of complementary counter-IED capability development programs, supporting four core counter-IED initiatives:

- Strategy, Integration, and Communications;
- Assessment and Planning;
- Information Sharing; and
- Training and Awareness

To reduce risk to the nation’s critical infrastructure, OBP develops and delivers a diverse array of services to enhance awareness of threats from IEDs and to build nationwide counter-IED capabilities. For example, the Bomb-Making Materials Awareness Program (BMAP) and its Operation Flashpoint partnership with the FBI help businesses and their employees more easily identify homemade explosives precursor chemicals, identify IED components, and recognize suspicious purchasing behavior that could indicate potential bomb-making activities. Additionally, the *Security and Resilience Guide* for countering IEDs provides comprehensive risk management and incident planning guidance appropriate for all types of jurisdictions or private-sector partners. OBP also offers a wide variety of fully accredited training courses and educational tools available in different formats, including online, that address IED threat awareness, prevention, risk management, device detection, and planning and response for bomb threats.

OBP has initiated outreach, in coordination with CISA's Protective Security Advisors (PSAs), to all HBCUs targeted by the recent bomb threats to assist with enhancing their security posture and highlight available CISA services, with a specific emphasis on bombing prevention. This outreach and offer of assistance is being expanded to all HBCUs. Though the dramatic spike of threats to HBCUs is very concerning, the unfortunate reality is that it is not a novel concept. According to data from CISA's *Technical Resource for Incident Prevention* website, HBCUs and minority communities receive numerous bomb threats each year. However, as the threat has intensified, so too has OBP's training and outreach efforts. OBP conducted numerous virtual bomb threat management trainings for HBCUs and other stakeholders over the course of the last few weeks, including two customized training sessions in early February, reaching a combined 461 individuals.

In the coming days, OBP will also deliver a customized Bomb Threat Management session, followed by a meeting and panel discussion in conjunction with the Atlanta University Center Consortium (AUCC). The AUCC is the world's oldest and largest consortium of HBCUs, composed of four member institutions—Clark Atlanta University, Morehouse College, Morehouse School of Medicine, and Spelman College. This event will be broadcast live and made available to all HBCUs nationally. We will continue to encourage our stakeholders across the community to use our training sessions, either virtually or in person, and have personnel ready to respond to additional requests as they come in.

Conclusion

DHS is committed to using every resource available to prevent, detect, and mitigate threats of violence directed at minority communities and educational institutions, including HBCUs. I want to assure the Committee and the community that responding to threats to HBCUs is a DHS-wide effort. The Department will continue to ensure that security officials from each HBCU have access to the latest threat information through our suite of information-sharing platforms, including the Homeland Security Information Network and *Technical Resource for Incident Prevention*. Additionally, we will continue to work with each HBCU to ensure that their security officials not only have access to this information, but are able to operationalize this information in their training, assessment, and security planning efforts.

We will also continue to work closely with our partners at the Department of Education and the FBI as we engage HBCUs and local community members to share information and resources related to these threats. The Administration understands that enhanced information sharing and preparedness is the foundation of our approach to prevent, detect, and mitigate acts of violence.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today, and for this Committee's continued support of the Department and our efforts. I look forward to continuing to work closely with you and other Members of Congress to keep our communities safe and secure.