

**Joint National Security and Civil Rights & Civil Liberties Subcommittee Hearing  
“Confronting Violent White Supremacy: Addressing the Transnational Terrorist Threat”  
September 20, 2019**

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Chairmen Lynch and Raskin, Ranking Members Hice and Roy, and distinguished Members of the House Oversight Subcommittees on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties and National Security, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I commend this Committee for tackling this issue in such a comprehensive way. I also want to thank my fellow panelists for their scholarship on violent white supremacy and the threat it poses to the United States homeland, which I turn to often to inform my own thinking.

I offer four overarching observations:

1. We must recognize the domestic and international dimensions to the threat from violent white supremacy.
2. The federal government should leverage national security tools to respond to the international dimensions of the threat from violent white supremacy.
3. Law enforcement and national security agencies should draw from 18 years of analysis regarding radicalism and extremist messaging to identify factors contributing to the spread of violent white supremacist ideology.
4. The federal government’s response to violent white supremacy must protect civil rights and civil liberties and focus on making vulnerable communities safer.

First, **we must recognize the domestic and international dimensions to the threat from violent white supremacy.** Violent white supremacy is not a new problem. It has been a persistent and pervasive threat in the United States since before our nation was founded. Nor are mass casualty events at the hands of violent extremists a new phenomenon. From 1865-1877 over 3,000 Americans were killed by a combination of the Ku Klux Klan and other local whites in a campaign of terrorist violence that overthrew Reconstructionist governments in the south and established segregationist regimes that lasted until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup> During our lifetimes, the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, inspired by violent white supremacy, killed 186 people, injured over 680 others, and was the deadliest act of terrorism in the United States until September 11, 2001.

Although the threat from violent white supremacy has long been worthy of our concern, recent violent attacks have drawn new attention to this hateful and deadly ideology. The FBI reports that, in recent years, there have been more domestic terrorism subjects thwarted by arrest

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<sup>1</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center, *Ku Klux Klan: A History of Racism and Violence*, 6th Ed. 2011, <https://www.splcenter.org/sites/default/files/Ku-Klux-Klan-A-History-of-Racism.pdf>.

and more deaths caused by domestic terrorists, than international terrorists.<sup>2</sup> While not all domestic terrorists are motivated by white supremacy, the overwhelming majority are. FBI Director Wray reported in July that a majority of the domestic terrorism cases being investigated are motivated by some version of white supremacist violence.<sup>3</sup> In 2018 and thus far in 2019, all but one of the ideologically motivated murders and homicides in each year were at the hands of far-right extremists or white supremacists.<sup>4</sup>

Importantly, the violent white supremacist movement is not confined within U.S. borders. Just like the violent jihadism that has been the focus of U.S. counterterrorism efforts over the last 18 years, violent white supremacy is a transnational problem that crosses international borders. From violent attacks around the world—from Norway to Charleston, from Canada to Pittsburgh, and from El Paso to New Zealand—white supremacists are increasingly finding and sharing inspiration for their deadly acts and invoking other murderers in their manifestos.<sup>5</sup>

For example, the New Zealand mosque attacker reportedly was inspired by and had possible connections to white European nationalists, and his manifesto credited both the Charleston church shooter and Norway summer camp shooter with inspiring his attacks.<sup>6</sup> In another example, the white supremacist who, this year, shot four people in a San Diego synagogue, one fatally, posted a letter online that spewed “white genocide” conspiracy theories that are shared worldwide, and cited both the New Zealand and Pittsburgh attacks as inspiration.<sup>7</sup>

Social media and the internet also play an obvious role in spreading white supremacist ideologies and connecting like-minded individuals and groups across international borders. The process of online radicalization is faster and less predictable than traditional extremist recruitment, and policy solutions must take its role into account.

While the international dimension of this problem is clear, what is less clear is its significance. We know that U.S.-based white supremacists have looked to foreign terrorist organizations for operational best practices, file sharing, use of encrypted applications, use of social media, and marketing and dissemination of their messages. Although they lack the formal structure or command and control of groups like ISIS or Al Qaeda, violent white supremacists are, to a degree, using the playbooks of foreign terrorist organizations to share tools that make

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<sup>2</sup> Michael C. McGarrity and Calvin A. Shivers, “Confronting White Supremacy,” statement before the House Oversight and Reform Committee, Subcommittee on Civil rights and Civil Liberties, House, 116<sup>th</sup> Cong (2019), <https://www.fbi.gov/news/testimony/confronting-white-supremacy>.

<sup>3</sup> Morgan Chalfant, “FBI’s Wray says most domestic terrorism arrests this year involve white supremacy,” *The Hill*, July 23, 2019, <https://thehill.com/homenews/administration/454338-fbis-wray-says-majority-of-domestic-terrorism-arrests-this-year>.

<sup>4</sup> George Selim, “White Supremacist Terror is Rising, and Trump’s Policies Kneecap Our Ability to Fight Back,” *USA Today*, April 26, 2019, <https://www.adl.org/news/op-ed/white-supremacist-terror-is-rising-and-trumps-policies-kneecap-our-ability-to-fight-back>.

<sup>5</sup> Jane Coaston, “The New Zealand shooter’s manifesto shows how white nationalist rhetoric spreads,” *Vox*, March 18, 2019, <https://www.vox.com/identities/2019/3/15/18267163/new-zealand-shooting-christchurch-white-nationalism-racism-language>.

<sup>6</sup> Linda Givetash, “New Zealand shooting suspect’s past travels to Europe under investigation,” NBC News, March 16, 2019, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/new-zealand-shooting-suspect-s-past-travels-europe-under-investigation-n984001>.

<sup>7</sup> Sarah Parvani, “Poway synagogue shooting suspect linked to anti-Semitic internet manifesto,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 28, 2019, <https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-synagogue-shooting-john-earnest-san-diego-20190428-story.html>.

them more effective and spread contagious messages that incite violence. That makes the international dimension of this problem worthy of our attention.

We also know that Russian efforts to interfere in the 2016 U.S. election included efforts to exploit existing racial tensions with a goal of inciting violence.<sup>8</sup> More should be done to understand these links and any other foreign state sponsorship of violent white supremacist propaganda or activities.

As we work to understand the transnational nature of this violent extremist movement, we must also be clear about what it is not. Violent white supremacists are advocating and committing premeditated, intentional attacks on their perceived “enemies” and seeking to further a shared cause. It is political violence, not a mental health issue or the result of violent video games.

While some gunmen do target innocent people for reasons that have no connection to an established ideology, those cases should be distinguished from attacks in the name of violent white supremacy, which is a movement motivated by an international political ideology. When the President or others refer to “disturbed minds” or propose to “better identify mentally disturbed individuals who may commit acts of violence,” they are not just repeating harmful tropes, they are denying the ideological link between these violent actors and a broader movement.<sup>9</sup> More importantly, they are diverting attention away from the solutions that can actually work.

Nor is violent white supremacy solely a state and local law enforcement issue. While the Justice Department defers the vast majority of hate crimes investigations to state and local law enforcement, states have limited tools to apply and are ill-equipped to investigate or determine whether the perpetrators are members of national or international, violent, far-right groups. State and local officials do not have access to intelligence information regarding organized violent groups overseas. They do not regularly monitor international violent extremist propaganda and communications. They cannot fully assess the similarities among individual acts of violence or infer broader national and international trends. And they cannot work with partner nations to share information about violent individuals or groups who are seeking to export their ideologies or incite violence abroad. While state and local law enforcement must be part of the solution, they cannot effectively respond to the violent white nationalist terrorist movement on their own.

Successfully countering violent white supremacy will, therefore, require us to look beyond traditional law enforcement approaches to consider other tools that are responsive to the international dimensions of the problem.

Second, **the federal government should leverage national security tools to respond to the international dimensions of the threat from violent white supremacy.** There are dozens of federal laws that criminalize the types of violent acts that violent white supremacists commonly commit, and provide mechanisms to dismantle associated criminal enterprises. As others have persuasively argued, more can and should be done to improve the effectiveness of traditional law enforcement policies and practices for investigating and prosecuting acts of white

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<sup>8</sup> Mihir Zaveri and Jacey Fortin, “Russian efforts exploited racial divisions, State of Black America report says,” New York Times, May 6, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/06/us/russia-disinformation-black-activists.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Quint Forgey, “Trump decries white supremacy, video games following shootings,” Politico, August 5, 2019, <https://www.politico.com/story/2019/08/05/trump-shootings-response-background-checks-immigration-1446549>.

supremacist violence.<sup>10</sup> We also need to confront the fact that serious gaps in our nation’s gun laws help to enable mass attacks by violent white supremacists.

At the same time, the federal government should leverage national security tools to improve how we understand and respond to the international dimensions of the white supremacist threat.

- The National Security Council Staff should actively implement last year’s National Strategy for Counterterrorism, which identifies domestic forms of violent extremism as terrorist threats. In driving department and agency action, and for reasons described more fully below, it should prioritize efforts against violent white supremacy.
- The Department of Justice (DOJ) and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) should work with other departments and agencies to develop a national strategy to counter the threat posed by domestic terrorism, and should acknowledge that violent white supremacy is currently the leading domestic threat to the homeland.
- DOJ and DHS should meaningfully study the effectiveness and impacts of investments in programs aimed at countering violent extremism, focusing not only on law enforcement measures, but also on vulnerable communities and civil rights and civil liberties.
- DOJ should expand and resource the office of the Domestic Terrorism Coordinator, which should remain housed within the Counterterrorism Section of the National Security Division so that it can easily access and utilize classified information about the international dimensions of the threat.
- The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) should comply with its existing policy to open a domestic terrorism investigation whenever a hate crime case involves a subject who is linked to a violent white supremacist group. It should also increase the number of FBI intelligence analysts assigned to gather and analyze intelligence on threats from violent white supremacy.
- The U.S. intelligence community should explicitly identify and distinguish violent white supremacists as threat actors, and increase the priority assigned to these threats within the National Intelligence Priorities Framework.
- The National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) should work within existing authority to coordinate with international partners to investigate global links to white supremacist violence. NCTC should also analyze and assess the threat posed by the international white supremacist movement, including any possible state sponsorship.
- The Department of State should prioritize and actively report on the scope and scale of the white nationalist extremist movement abroad, leverage the Global Counterterrorism Forum to mobilize global expertise and resources, and secure the cooperation of international partners to counter the threat.

The Trump Administration can implement these recommendations within existing authorities, and they should do so without delay. Importantly, these ideas do not call for

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<sup>10</sup> “Brennan Center and Allies Urge Members of Congress to Appropriately Address White Nationalist Violence,” Brennan Center for Justice, September 4, 2019, <https://www.brennancenter.org/analysis/brennan-center-urges-members-congress-reject-new-domestic-terror-laws>.

increased monitoring or surveillance of any domestic individuals or groups, whose views—while deeply offensive—may constitute protected speech.

Republican lawmakers who survived a horrifying attack at a baseball practice a few blocks from my residence know well that politically motivated violence comes in all varieties, and is no less murderous when it is inspired by the far-left than when it is inspired by the far-right. Politically motivated violence is worthy of serious attention whenever it occurs, regardless of where the perpetrator falls on the political spectrum.

However, not all politically motivated violence is inspired by an ideology that transcends national borders or conducted by attackers who situate their actions in a transnational context. Where politically motivated violence is purely domestic and lacks a global ideology, it should be treated as a domestic law enforcement matter. But where there are well-established international links and a clear global dimension, as in the case of violent white supremacy, the threat is no longer domestic. It is transnational. In such cases, the federal government can and should prioritize it as a national security concern.

**Third, law enforcement and national security agencies should draw from 18 years of analysis regarding radicalism and extremist messaging to identify factors contributing to the spread of violent white supremacist ideology.** As we have long known, violent extremists are not born, they are made. Distorted interpretations of religion and culture and conspiracies about the motives of others fuel the growth of dangerous ideologies. For the last 18 years the government has studied and analyzed foreseeable steps on the pathway to radicalization, as well as, the strategies that are most effective in countering them. We should draw from those lessons as we confront the threat from violent white supremacy.

In particular, NCTC—the agency responsible for fusing terrorism-related intelligence—should produce an unclassified report on the lessons learned from its study of the pathways to radicalization, focusing on the drivers that move extremists beyond radicalization to mobilization and committing acts of violence. The report should include an examination of how political leaders can avoid enflaming politically motivated violence and play a constructive role in countering the threat.

Academic studies suggest that the social divisions that tend to incite violence can be exploited through propaganda that validates feelings of marginalization, injustice, and duress.<sup>11</sup> It would be useful to know the extent to which the intelligence community's assessments align with academic research on this topic. But it is essential that we learn more about the role that messages from political leaders play in radicalizing and mobilizing violent actors. In multiple instances, violent white supremacists have pointed to the President's rhetoric in justifying their attacks.<sup>12</sup> No political leader wants their words twisted to justify violence. NCTC's work can

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<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Michael A. Jensen, "Radicalization to Violence: A Pathway Approach to Studying Extremism," *Journal of Terrorism and Political Violence*, April 9, 2018, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09546553.2018.1442330?needAccess=true&journalCode=ftpv20>.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Peter Baker and Michael D. Shear, "El Paso Suspect's Manifesto Echoes Trump's Language," *New York Times*, August 4, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/04/us/politics/trump-mass-shootings.html>; Benjamin Weiser and Ali Watkins, "Cesar Sayoc, Who Mailed Pipe Bombs to Trump Critics, Is Sentenced to 20 Years," *New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/05/nyregion/cesar-sayoc-sentencing-pipe-bombing.html>; Spencer S. Hsu and Peter Hermann, "D.C. man arrested on gun charge after relatives alert police to his alleged white nationalist outbursts," *Washington Post*, November 13, 2018,

help us establish empirical benchmarks so that we can enlist our political leaders in avoiding the kind of political rhetoric that leads to violence. This work can also help to inform the development of other policy solutions.

Fourth, **the government’s response to violent white supremacy must protect civil rights and civil liberties and focus on making vulnerable communities safer.** As law enforcement and national security agencies ramp up their focus on the threat from violent white supremacy, they should ensure that their efforts do not harm the communities they are trying to protect or the civil liberties of Americans. The counterterrorism policies of the last two decades have made us safer, but they have not been without flaws. In the name of protecting the homeland, some government approaches have wrongly been shaped by stereotypes and ethno-religious prejudices. Others have been ineffective or constitutionally problematic, harming rather than helping the communities they were intended to protect.

Because of this legacy, the idea of using national security tools to counter violent white supremacy understandably concerns many in the civil liberties and privacy community, as well as, in communities of color. We should learn from them, not only because these are the communities that disproportionately suffer from violence committed by white supremacists, but also because they have lived experiences with government counterterrorism efforts and have perspectives on what has, and has not, made us safer. We should listen to their concerns.

We should also closely adhere to established limits on the domestic use of national security tools. In recommending that we more fully understand the international dimensions of this issue, and explore lessons learned about the pathway to radicalization, I am not advocating for an expansion of authorities. On the contrary. As my testimony emphasizes, much can be accomplished by creatively leveraging the tools and authorities our government agencies already have.

Much can also be learned from the gains we have made from enlisting partners in these efforts. On the national security side, international partnerships have proven essential. At home, intensive cooperation with state and local law enforcement, technology companies, civic society, and vulnerable communities, including communities of color, has been the only way to develop comprehensive and effective solutions.<sup>13</sup>

Going forward, we should not assume that the counterterrorism and counter-radicalization approaches of the past are the best approaches for the future. Efforts focused on countering the threat from violent white supremacy will require new strategies that should be grounded in the rule of law and respect for human rights—values that distinguish us from white supremacist threat actors. New approaches should also draw from our experiences and lessons learned since 9/11 about what has been effective and what has not. Evidence-based assessments of impact should guide investments at FBI, DHS, and elsewhere.

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[https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/public-safety/dc-man-arrested-on-gun-charge-after-relatives-alert-police-to-his-alleged-white-nationalist-outbursts/2018/11/13/e3a6d2fa-e771-11e8-b8dc-66cca409c180\\_story.htm](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/public-safety/dc-man-arrested-on-gun-charge-after-relatives-alert-police-to-his-alleged-white-nationalist-outbursts/2018/11/13/e3a6d2fa-e771-11e8-b8dc-66cca409c180_story.htm).

<sup>13</sup> Center for Security and International Studies, “A Different Face of Terror: Comparing and Contrasting Domestic Violent Extremism with International Terrorism,” September 16, 2019, <https://www.csis.org/events/different-face-terror-comparing-and-contrasting-domestic-violent-extremism-international>.

## **Conclusion**

All of us have an interest in ensuring that globally inspired, violent ideologies do not take root in the United States. Our history tells us that such violence takes many forms, and consequently our approach in countering it must be fact-based and must evolve as the threat evolves. As Congress looks to close legal, policy, and resource gaps related to violent white supremacy, it should develop solutions to address both the domestic and international dimensions of the threat. In doing so, it should seek to ensure that federal departments and agencies are maximizing the use of the law enforcement and national security tools they already have. In addition, federal agencies should partner closely with state and local law enforcement, technology companies, civic society, and communities of color to ensure they are implementing solutions that protect vulnerable communities and make Americans safer.

The Trump Administration can carry out all of these recommendations within existing authorities, and it should do so without delay.