



# Department of Justice

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**STATEMENT OF**  
**JILL SANBORN**  
**ASSISTANT DIRECTOR**  
**COUNTERTERRORISM DIVISION**  
**FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION**

**BEFORE THE**  
**SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE AND COUNTERTERRORISM**  
**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY**  
**U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**AT A HEARING ENTITLED**  
**“CONFRONTING THE RISE IN**  
**ANTI-SEMITIC DOMESTIC TERRORISM, PART II”**

**PRESENTED**  
**FEBRUARY 26, 2020**

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Good afternoon, Chairman Rose, Ranking Member Walker, and Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I welcome the opportunity to discuss the FBI’s efforts to combat the terrorism threat to the Homeland, specifically the increasingly lethal threat posed by violent extremism to the Jewish community.

***Threat Assessment***

While the threat posed by terrorism has evolved significantly since 9/11, preventing terrorist attacks from foreign and domestic actors remains the FBI’s top priority. We face persistent threats to the Homeland and to U.S. interests abroad from foreign terrorist organizations (“FTO”), homegrown violent extremists (“HVE”), and domestic violent extremists (“DVE”). The threat posed to the United States has expanded from sophisticated, externally directed plots to attacks conducted by radicalized lone actors who mobilize to violence based on international and domestic violent ideologies.

In this vein, the greatest threat we face in the Homeland today is that posed by lone actors radicalized online who look to attack soft targets with easily accessible weapons. This threat includes both HVEs and DVEs, two distinct sets of individuals who generally radicalize and mobilize to violence on their own. Many of these insular violent extremists are motivated and inspired by a mix of ideological, socio-political, and personal grievances against their targets, which recently have increasingly included large public gatherings, houses of worship, and retail locations. Lone actors, who by definition are not likely to conspire with others regarding their plans, are increasingly choosing these soft, familiar targets for their attacks, further limiting law enforcement opportunities for detection and disruption ahead of their action.

These lone actors have targeted and will likely continue to pose a threat to the Jewish community. Multiple recent attacks against the Jewish community perpetrated by

Racially/Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremists highlight the diverse nature of this threat. In just the last 18 months, anti-Semitic terrorism has devastated Jewish communities from Pueblo to Poway to Pittsburgh to Jersey City. These attacks were planned by individuals with a variety of ideological motivations that justify violence towards others, to include those who advocate for a perceived superiority of the white race, as well as individuals with an ideology that believes western hemisphere-based minorities are the true Jewish race and are empowered to eradicate those not in their belief system. In fact, the top threat we face from DVEs stems from those we identify as Racially/Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremists. Racially/Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremists were the primary source of all ideologically-motivated lethal incidents and violence in 2018 and 2019 and have been considered the most lethal of all domestic violent extremists since 2001. We assess the threat posed by Racially/Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremists in the Homeland and will remain persistent going forward.

Domestic violent extremists 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 approaching the 25th anniversary of that horrific attack.

HVEs, who are global jihad-inspired; FTOs; and state sponsors of terrorism have also demonstrated and acted upon a desire to target Jewish houses of worship and the Jewish community in the United States. Groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham (“ISIS”), the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (“IRGC”), and Hizballah have established anti-Semitic intent and encouraged their followers to target Jewish persons and interests both in the Homeland and around the world. In April 2016, an individual in southern Florida was arrested by the FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force (“JTTF”) based on his plot to attack a Florida Jewish Center with an improvised explosive device (“IED”) in support of a FTO. In August 2018, two individuals were arrested for working on behalf of the Islamic Republic of Iran to conduct surveillance of Jewish facilities in the United States. In December 2018, a JTTF in Ohio arrested a subject who identified two different synagogues in Toledo he wanted to attack in support of ISIS. These arrests reflect just a few examples of international terrorism actors who have targeted the Jewish community.

It is important to note again that the FBI is concerned about any and all acts of terrorism. Multiple lethal attacks in the last five years have underscored the threat posed by violent extremist actors to all faith-based communities in the United States. From the attack on the Emanuel AME Church in Charleston in 2015 to the attack on a Hanukkah celebration in Monsey just two months ago, our faith-based communities have been targeted during services, in their

places of worship, which have included temples, synagogues, churches, mosques, and private homes; and in their grocery stores and community centers. Each attack represents unacceptable violence against a group of Americans gathered together to exercise their Constitutional right to practice their religious beliefs freely. The FBI takes these attacks very seriously, and is committed to working with our partners to prevent these acts of terrorism.

The attacks and disrupted plots we saw in 2019 underscore the continued threat posed by violent extremists. Such crimes are not limited to the United States, however, and with the aid of the Internet, like-minded violent extremists can reach across borders. Violent extremists are increasingly using social media for the distribution of propaganda, recruitment, target selection, and incitement to violence. Through the Internet, violent extremists around the world have access to our local communities to target, recruit, and radicalize like-minded individuals and on a global scale. Attackers both in the United States and overseas, for example, have posted manifestos dedicated to their ideology prior to their attacks.

Last year's attack in Poway not only highlights the enduring threat of violence posed by domestic violent extremists, but also demonstrates the danger presented by the propagation of these violent acts on the Internet. The attacker in Poway referenced the mosque attacks in Christchurch, New Zealand, and we remain concerned that online sharing of livestreamed attack footage could amplify viewer reaction to attacks and provide ideological and tactical inspiration to other violent extremists in the Homeland. Less than two months after the attacks in Christchurch, FBI JTTFs in multiple states disrupted plots both to replicate and to retaliate for those attacks in New Zealand. We continue to see subjects reference foreign attackers in the course of their radicalization process. In recent years we have also increasingly seen domestic violent extremists both communicating and traveling to meet with like-minded individuals overseas. Some of these individuals have traveled to conflict zones for combat training and established contacts with foreign military and paramilitary organizations, which could increase their capacity for violence here in the Homeland.

### ***FBI and Partnership Action to Combat the Threat***

As the threat to harm the United States and U.S. interests evolves, we are adapting and confronting these challenges, relying heavily on the strength of our federal, state, local, tribal, and international partnerships. In that vein, it is important to highlight the men and women across this country that work to fight terrorism every day. That includes the men and women of the FBI, who have dedicated their lives to our mission to protect the American people from its enemies and to uphold the Constitution of the United States. It also includes the men and women across the United States who serve on our Joint Terrorism Task Forces and in our Fusion Centers, who work with the FBI to identify, assess, and disrupt terrorism threats in the Homeland. These force-multipliers in the counterterrorism fight serve as the front line in the Homeland and bring invaluable experience and familiarity with the local community to our investigations. Just in January 2020, JTTFs across the 50 states disrupted 22 terrorism subjects by arrest.

In this vein, I would be remiss if I did not mention the great work being done to fight the scourge of hate crimes by my colleagues in our Criminal Investigative Division. Through our Domestic Terrorism-Hate Crimes Fusion Cell we at the FBI apply the expertise, dedication, and resources of both the Counterterrorism and Criminal Investigative Divisions to these overlapping threats, working to prevent the threats on the horizon and provide justice to the victims of hate crimes. Because individual incidents may be investigated as both domestic terrorism and as a hate crime, we bring the force of the FBI to bear against any event that may fall into these categories, investigating crimes through the lenses of both Divisions unless or until one avenue is foreclosed or eliminated. This Fusion Cell helps ensure seamless information sharing across Divisions and augments investigative resources to combat the domestic terrorism threat, ensuring we are not solely focusing on the current threat or most recent attack, but also looking to the future to prevent the next one.

In the last year, the FBI investigated countless threats to religious institutions. Our most valuable tool in this counterterrorism fight exists in our relationships with local communities and the public, who are best positioned to notice a change in an individual's behavior and alert the FBI to threats that endanger members and congregants. In line with this effort, the FBI's partnerships with leaders in the faith-based communities are paramount to our success. Just a few months ago the FBI held a Roundtable with leaders from the faith-based community across the country to discuss the threats posed to their members and the importance of vigilance in their places of worship. Perhaps more importantly, our Field Offices conduct outreach with faith-based leaders in their areas of responsibility to host interfaith working groups and training in an effort to ensure communities are kept abreast of the current threat picture and are in the best position to prevent and mitigate acts of terrorism when they arise.

It is also important to highlight our outreach to social media and technology companies. FBI interactions with social media companies center on education and capacity building, in line with our goal to assist companies in developing or enhancing their terms of service to address violent extremist exploitation of their platforms. I want to emphasize that no FBI investigation can be opened solely on the basis of First Amendment-protected activity. Thus, the FBI does not investigate mere hateful rhetoric or association with groups that are not engaged in criminal activity, or with movements without any element of violence or criminal activity. In order to predicate a domestic terrorism investigation of an individual, the FBI must have information that there is the potential for a federal or criminal violation and that the individual is threatening or planning violent actions in furtherance of an ideology. In this vein, we remain sensitive to First Amendment-protected activities during investigative and intelligence efforts so as to ensure our investigative actions remain aligned to and do not exceed the scope of our authorities and are conducted with the appropriate protections in place for privacy and civil liberties.

In a recent FBI study of HVEs who were successful in conducting their attacks, the FBI found that in every instance, at least one person saw a change in the attacker's behavior before the individual mobilized to violence. This was not surprising given the frequency with which the

FBI receives terrorism-related tips from the community, law enforcement, or other government agencies. In this vein, increased community awareness of concerning behaviors and encouraging reporting of those behaviors are critical in our fight against terrorism in the Homeland. Friends and family are always in the best position to notice a change in the behavior of their loved ones. Their willingness to reach out to law enforcement and others in the community to get help for individuals they are concerned about make them critical to protecting others in their communities and neighborhoods. We need the public to maintain this awareness, and help us to expand the understanding that “See Something, Say Something” is not a plea for vigilance limited to unattended baggage—it also includes our responsibility to speak up when we believe an individual in our midst could be radicalizing to violence.

### *Conclusion*

The FBI would not be as successful as we are in identifying and detecting violent extremists before they act if it were not for our close relationships with all of our partners across the country, including law enforcement at the federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial levels, as well as our partners in the faith-based communities and the private sector. In conjunction with these partners we constantly collect and analyze information concerning the ongoing threats posed by violent extremists and work to share that information with these partners around the country, and with our international partners around the world. The American lives saved in communities across this country are a testament to their hard work and dedication to disrupting terrorism from any place, by any actor.

Chairman Rose, Ranking Member Walker, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify concerning the evolving terrorism threat to the Homeland. As I hope I will make clear to you today, the FBI takes very seriously the threat of terrorism in any place, by any actor, against any individual or group. Regardless of a case classification or indictment category, we work daily to carry out the FBI mission to protect the American people and uphold the Constitution of the United States. We are grateful for the support that you and this Subcommittee have provided to the FBI, and we look forward to answering any questions you might have.