

TRUMP CALLS HIS ENEMIES TERRORISTS. DOES THAT MEAN HE CAN JUST KILL THEM?

From boat strikes to killings in the streets of Minnesota to NSPM-7, the White House leans on the word “terror” to justify its violence.

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Posters displaying images of Renee Good and Alex Pretti in south Minneapolis on Jan. 29, 2026. Photo: Ben Brewer/Bloomberg via Getty Images

“TERRORIST” IS THE WORD that the Trump administration employs to describe the victims of its most egregious acts of state violence.

President Donald Trump has used the word “terrorist” to justify the extrajudicial killings of civilians in the Caribbean Sea and Pacific Ocean. And his deputies used it to explain away the killings of Alex Pretti and Renee Good in Minneapolis by federal agents.

“Earlier this morning, on my Orders, U.S. Military Forces conducted a kinetic strike against positively identified Tren de Aragua Narco terrorists,” Trump [wrote](#) following the initial boat strike on September 2, 2025. He said the attack “occurred while the terrorists were at sea in International waters.”

Secretary of Homeland Security Kristi Noem said that Good and Pretti were guilty of “[domestic terrorism](#).” And top White House adviser Stephen Miller used similar [language](#) to [describe](#) both.

These killings were conducted thousands of miles apart by different agencies in very different contexts. But the connection between them could be more than semantic.

Under National Security Presidential Memorandum 7, or [NSPM-7](#), Trump’s Justice Department is now assembling a secret “domestic terrorist organization” database. It also maintains a secret list of “designated terrorist organizations” with whom the U.S. claims to be at war.

For months, the White House and Justice Department have failed to answer a question that becomes more relevant with every person branded a domestic terrorist, shot by federal agents, or both: Are Americans who the federal government deems to be domestic terrorists under NSPM-7 subject to extrajudicial killings like those it claims are members of designated terrorist organizations on boats at sea?

“If we’re going to say it’s OK to kill so-called terrorists in the Caribbean, for actions that have traditionally been dealt with as a criminal matter, using due process – what’s to say you can’t do the same in an American city?” asked Rep. Mary Gay Scanlon, D-Pa., the ranking member of the House Judiciary Committee’s Subcommittee on Constitution and Limited Government. “That is the very scary but logical end of all these things the Trump administration is doing.”

Trump’s de facto declaration of war on dissent, NSPM-7, conflates constitutionally protected speech and political activism with “domestic terrorism” – a term that has no basis in U.S. law. That memorandum, which was issued in September, and an implementation memo released in December by Attorney General Pam Bondi, [specifically targets](#) those that espouse what the administration defines as anti-Americanism, anti-capitalism, anti-Christianity, anti-fascism, and radical gender ideologies, as well as those with “hostility toward those who hold traditional American views.” At a minimum, the memorandum raises serious First Amendment, due process, and civil liberties concerns.



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Bondi’s December memo, “Implementing National Security Presidential Memorandum-7: Countering Domestic Terrorism and Organized Political Violence,” which the Justice Department shared with The Intercept, defines “domestic terrorism” in the broadest possible terms, including “doxing” and “conspiracies to impede ... law enforcement.”

Federal immigration [agents](#) consider [observing](#), [following](#), and [filming](#) [their](#) operations a [crime](#) under [18 U.S.C. § 111](#): assaulting, resisting, or

[impeding](#) a federal officer. This is also the foremost statute in a directory of prioritized crimes listed in NSPM-7.

Federal officers frequently [confront](#) and [threaten](#) those observing, following, and filming them for “[impeding](#)” their efforts. In [numerous instances](#), they have [unholstered](#) or [pointed weapons](#) at the [people](#) who [filmed](#) or [followed them](#).

A recent [report](#) by the CATO Institute notes that it is “crucial to understand that ICE and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) consider people who follow DHS and ICE agents to observe, record, or protest their operations as engaging in ‘impeding.’” It goes on to note that DHS “has a systematic policy of threatening people who follow ICE or DHS agents to record their activities with detentions, arrests, and violence, and agents have already chased, detained, arrested, charged, struck, and shot at people who follow them.”

Before their killings, both Pretti and Good had been [observing](#) agents’ activities. In the wake of Good’s death, the Justice Department opened an investigation of Good’s widow for allegedly “[interfering](#)” with an ICE operation – apparently for filming the shooting.

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NSPM-7 alleges vast “organized structures, networks, entities, organizations, [and] funding sources” [support leftist](#) “criminal and

terroristic conspiracies.” It adds, “These campaigns are coordinated and perpetrated by actors who have developed a comprehensive strategy to achieve specific policy goals through radicalization and violent intimidation.”

The Trump administration has framed the Minneapolis protests and a larger movement in Minnesota and beyond in the same terms as NSPM-7, painting it as a “[Radical Left Movement of Violence and Hate](#)” coordinated by a vast network of “[highly paid professional agitators and anarchists](#),” as well as “[insurrectionists](#)” supported by [corrupt](#) Democratic lawmakers and officials or “[sanctuary politicians](#)” who are inciting [violence](#) against federal officers.

Trump [endorsed](#) Vice President JD Vance’s baseless claim that Good was part of a “[broader left-wing network](#)” that sometimes uses “domestic terror techniques” to “attack, to dox, to assault and to make it impossible for our ICE officers to do their job.” Miller suggested Pretti was one of an unknown number of militants operating in Minneapolis. “A would-be assassin tried to murder federal law enforcement and the official Democrat account sides with the terrorists,” he [wrote](#) on X on Saturday, referring to comments by a Democratic party account calling for ICE to withdraw from Minneapolis.

Trump initially described Pretti as a “[gunman](#),” although the ICU nurse never drew his [licensed handgun](#) before being executed at point blank range by federal agents. After briefly softening his tone on Pretti, Trump called him an “Agitator and, perhaps, insurrectionist” in a Friday Truth Social [post](#).



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Miller [bills](#) NSPM-7 as the first “all-of-government effort to dismantle left-wing terrorism,” which he calls a sophisticated, well-funded network supported by an “entire system of feeder organizations that provide money, resources, weapons.” Bondi’s implementation memo also offers a fictitious apocalyptic vision of urban America which the Trump administration has employed to justify its domestic [military occupations](#), including “mass rioting and destruction in our cities” and “violent efforts to shut down immigration enforcement.”

“This political violence is not a series of isolated incidents and does not emerge organically,”

Scanlon told The Intercept, quoting from a section of

NSPM-7 that details a supposed coordinated effort by [antifascists](#) and other administration enemies. But Scanlon framed it in terms of the Trump administration’s own authoritarian campaign. “The paragraph describing how political violence takes root and becomes more widespread basically describes the Trump era. Every accusation is a confession with this administration. You talk about targeted intimidation and radicalization and threats and violence designed to silence opposing speech – it’s all there, and we’re seeing it unfold.”

Federal immigration officers have shot at least 13 people since September, killing at least five, including Pretti and Good, according to [data compiled](#) by The Trace.

“What the Trump Administration is doing in Minnesota is a testing ground for a paramilitary police state across the country,” [said](#) Rep. April McClain Delaney, D-Md., on January 25. “Masked DHS agents are now operating in Minnesota neighborhoods with impunity – terrorizing families and neighborhoods, slandering the victims with

“Every accusation is a confession with this administration.”

lies, silencing dissent, seizing and detaining protesters, eroding basic civil liberties and killing American citizens.”



Donald Trump holds an executive order he signed in the Oval Office of the White House on Jan. 30, 2026, in Washington, D.C. Photo: Evan Vucci/AP

AT THE SAME time shootings by immigration agents have ramped up at home, the Trump administration has been **killing civilians** in the Caribbean Sea and eastern Pacific Ocean. The U.S. military has carried out 36 known attacks, destroying 37 boats, since September, **killing at least** 126 civilians. The most recent attack occurred in the Pacific Ocean on January 23, killing three people. The administration insists the attacks are permitted because the U.S. is engaged in “**non-international armed conflict**” with “**designated terrorist organizations**” it refuses to name. **Experts**, current and former government officials, and **lawmakers** say these killings are outright **murders**.

“This administration has asserted the prerogative to kill people outside the law, solely on the basis of the president labeling them terrorists. And there are no obvious limits to this license to kill,” said Brian Finucane, a former State Department lawyer who is a specialist in

counterterrorism issues and the laws of war. “The president has wielded that authority in the Caribbean and the Pacific and could wield it domestically. Indeed, the fact that they invoked domestic terrorism to justify the killings of Rene Good and Alex Pretti suggests they already might have.”



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White House Refuses to Rule Out Summary Executions of People on Its Secret Domestic Terrorist List

Since October, The Intercept has been [asking if the White House](#) would rule out [conducting summary executions](#) of members of the list “of any such groups or entities” designated as “domestic terrorist organization[s]” under NSPM-7, without a response. Return receipts also show that Justice Department spokesperson Natalie Baldassarre has repeatedly read The Intercept’s questions on this subject over months but has failed to offer an answer.

Faiza Patel, the senior director of the Brennan Center for Justice’s liberty and national security program, told The Intercept that while it wasn’t possible to directly link NSPM-7 to the killings of Good and Pretti, the memorandum’s rhetoric about what constitutes domestic terrorism “is reflected in senior officials’ statements and it seems that DHS agents on the ground view any opposition to their actions as warranting extreme and even lethal force.”

Federal agents from ICE and Homeland Security Investigations assigned to Minneapolis received a memo earlier in January asking them to collect identifying information on “agitators, protestors, etc.,” CNN [reported](#) Tuesday. Last week, a masked immigration agent [warned](#) a woman filming their activities in Portland, Maine, that her information would be entered into a “nice little database” that would label her a

“domestic terrorist.” Tom Homan, Trump’s border czar and Border Patrol commander-at-large Gregory Bovino’s [replacement](#), also [mentioned the database](#) the same month on Fox News. “We’re going to create a database,” he said, noting that it would include those “arrested for interference, impeding and assault.” Journalist Ken Klippenstein recently [reported on](#) more than a dozen “secret and obscure watchlists” being used to track protesters and supposed “domestic terrorists.”

DHS spokesperson Tricia McLaughlin says her department does not administer the secret database. “There is NO database of ‘domestic terrorists’ run by DHS,” she told The Intercept by email. “We do of course monitor and investigate and refer all threats, assaults and obstruction of our officers to the appropriate law enforcement.” DHS’s Office of Intelligence and Analysis [does admit](#) that it “nominated over 4,600 people to the terrorist watchlist” in the last year and says ICE arrested more than 1,400 “known or suspected terrorists.”



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NSPM-7 directs Bondi to compile a list “of any such groups or entities” to be designated as “domestic terrorist organization[s],” and Bondi has ordered the FBI to “compile a list of groups or entities engaging in acts that may constitute domestic terrorism,” according to the December 4 memo. Last fall, FBI Director [Kash Patel told senators](#) that there were “1,700 domestic terrorism investigations” and that it represented “a 300% increase in cases opened this year alone versus the same time last year.”

When asked if Good or Pretti were on any domestic terrorism list, watchlist, or under surveillance by federal authorities, a bureau

spokesperson said: “The FBI has no comment.”

Neither NSPM-7 nor the December 4 memo mentions summary executions, and both speak explicitly in terms of “prosecution” and “arrest” of members of domestic terrorist organizations. Attacks on members of designated terrorist organizations are justified by another document: a [classified opinion](#) from the Justice Department’s Office of Legal Counsel with a [secret list](#) of cartels and gangs attached to it.

The Justice Department memo notes that under Section 3 of NSPM-7, “the FBI, in coordination with its partners on the [Joint Terrorism Task Forces], and consistent with applicable law, shall compile a list of groups or entities engaged in acts that may constitute domestic terrorism” and “provide that list to the Deputy Attorney General.”

The FBI’s national press office directed The Intercept to contact the Department of Justice concerning questions about the NSPM-7 list. [Baldassarre](#) also failed to respond to those queries.

“To the extent that the White House somehow has a secret enemies list and people don’t know who’s on it – that goes beyond McCarthyism,” Scanlon told The Intercept. “It’s absolutely horrific.”

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Recent reported statements by Trump suggest that the president may see little difference between those the administration brands foreign and domestic terrorists nor in efforts to combat them. Last month, the U.S. [attacked](#) Venezuela and [abducted](#) its president, Nicolás Maduro,

killing scores of people, [including civilians](#). Maduro – whom Trump branded a [terrorist](#) – was brought to the U.S. and charged with numerous offenses, foremost among them, according to the [State Department](#), “narco-terrorism.”

Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz said last week that Trump compared his federal immigration crackdown in his state to the attack in Venezuela that ousted Maduro. “He told me how well that went,” Walz [told MS NOW](#). “Which really was strange to me was he saw an operation in Venezuela against a foreign nation in the same context he saw an operation against a U.S. state and a U.S. city.”

The White House did not return a request for comment.

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