



STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD

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“Countering Domestic Terrorism”

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Chairman Carson, Ranking Member Crawford, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you very much for the opportunity to be at this important hearing.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS or the Department) confronts a wide array of threats on behalf of the American people. These threats that endanger our communities and our way of life 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 remains a top priority for DHS.

In the years immediately following 9/11, we were most focused on foreign terrorists who sought to attack the homeland and threaten our interests and assets abroad. In partnership with 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, as well as mechanisms to safeguard the civil rights and civil liberties of all communities and persons. We also called for vigilance on the part of local communities and individuals alike.

Terrorism-related threats to the homeland then evolved to include homegrown violent extremists (HVE) – the individuals in America who are radicalized by a foreign terrorist organization’s ideology, but not receiving individualized direction from those groups. In response, we 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. We strengthened our capacity within the United States to identify and share threat information between all levels of government, with the private sector, and with our foreign counterparts.

Additionally, the threat from domestic violent extremists (DVEs) – recognized by DHS as U.S.-based lone actors and small groups who seek to further political or social goals wholly or in part through unlawful acts of force or violence, without direction or inspiration from a foreign terrorist group or foreign power – continues to evolve. These actors are motivated by various factors, including biases against minorities, perceived government overreach, conspiracy theories promoting violence, and false narratives often spread online. Today, U.S. based lone actors and small groups who are inspired by a broad range of ideologies, including HVEs and DVEs, pose the most significant and persistent threat to the homeland. We continue to leverage the capabilities and partnerships that grew out of 9/11, applying those capabilities, and lessons learned over the past 20 years, to the diverse set of violent threats we face today.

Domestic Violent Extremism

DHS considers DVEs to be individuals 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. The Intelligence Community (IC) assessed that DVEs, who are motivated by a range of ideologies and galvanized by recent political and societal events, pose an elevated threat to the United States. This March 2021 assessment from DHS, the FBI, and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence titled, *Domestic Violent Extremism Poses Heightened Threat in 2021* found that through 2020 and into 2021, DVEs have mobilized to violence based on a range of ideological beliefs and perceived grievances based on a range of factors. These factors include perceived government overreach in

COVID-19 mitigation efforts; conspiracy theories related to the 2020 election; and in reactions to and exploitation of the demonstrations and violence during the summer of 2020.

Most recently, DHS's Office of Intelligence and Analysis (I&A) assessed, in the near term, some DVEs likely will threaten violence or plot against healthcare personnel, facilities, and public officials in response to renewed and expanding COVID-19 mitigation measures. Throughout the pandemic, DVEs have threatened or incited violence against the healthcare sector and public officials as some DVEs perceive pandemic mitigation measures as government overreach.

The IC assesses racially or ethnically motivated violent extremists (RMVEs), including those who advocate for the superiority of the white race, and militia violent extremists (MVEs) – a subset of anti-government or anti-authority violent extremists – present the most lethal DVE threats, with RMVEs most likely to conduct mass-casualty attacks against civilians and MVEs typically targeting law enforcement, elected officials, and government personnel and facilities. These DVEs are motivated and inspired by a mix of ideological, sociopolitical, and personal grievances against their targets, which have increasingly included large public gatherings, houses of worship, law enforcement and government facilities, and retail locations. Lone actors, who are not likely to conspire with others regarding their plans, are increasingly choosing soft, familiar targets for their attacks, limiting law enforcement opportunities for detection and disruption.

According to the 2021 Director of National Intelligence Annual Threat Assessment, RMVEs who espouse an overlapping mix of white supremacist, neo-Nazi, and exclusionary cultural-nationalist beliefs have the most persistent transnational connections among DVEs via loose online communities to like-minded individuals and groups in the West. The threat from this diffused movement has ebbed and flowed for decades but increased since 2015.

RMVEs who promote the superiority of the white race were responsible for at least 26 lethal attacks killing more than 141 people and for dozens of disrupted plots in the West since 2015. While these extremists often see themselves as part of a broader global movement, most attacks were carried out by individuals or small, independent cells. Australia, Germany, Norway, and the United Kingdom consider RMVEs who advocate for the superiority of the white race, including Neo-Nazi groups, to be the fastest growing terrorist threat they face.

The current National Terrorism Advisory System (NTAS) Bulletin, released on August 13, 2021, further notes that through the remainder of 2021, RMVEs and anti-government or anti-authority violent extremists remain a threat to the United States. These DVEs may continue to seek to exploit COVID-19 pandemic mitigation measures by viewing potential re-establishment of public health restrictions across the United States as a rationale to conduct attacks. Additionally, some RMVEs advocate for a race war and have stated civil disorder provides increased opportunities to engage in violence in furtherance of agendas often derived from racial or ethnic bias – a process of increasing violence with the aim of hastening adoption of their agendas often referred to as “accelerationism.”

These DVEs are typically fueled by violent extremist rhetoric and other grievances, including false narratives and conspiracy theories, often spread through social media and other online platforms by a broad range of domestic actors, and occasionally amplified by foreign threat actors. 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 continue to pose significant detection and disruption challenges because of their ability to mobilize discreetly and independently and 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.

Role of I&A in the Domestic Terrorism Space

The Homeland Security Act authorizes DHS to engage in intelligence activities aimed at countering terrorism, regardless of whether it is international or domestic. I&A collects information overtly or from publicly available information in furtherance of national and departmental missions, including its international and domestic terrorism missions. Any such collection must be done in a manner that protects fully the legal rights of all United States persons, including freedoms, civil liberties, and privacy rights guaranteed by the Constitution and Federal law. The advocacy of political or social positions, political activism, use of strong rhetoric, or even generalized advocacy for violent tactics does not constitute violent extremism and is in general constitutionally protected speech, so long as the speaker does not engage or incite others to engage in violence to advance their political aims. All of I&A's intelligence activities in this space are appropriately funded by the National Intelligence Program, consistent with applicable law (50 U.S.C. §3003(6)).

I&A relies on its intelligence professionals in the field and at headquarters to identify and analyze information and intelligence on threats to the Homeland, including threats related to domestic terrorism. Working with partners from across the federal government, and from the state, local, tribal, and territorial (SLTT) governments, and private sector, these experts inform the necessary stakeholders on threats through a variety of mechanisms—including raw and finished intelligence reporting, briefings, and engagements. This framework is essential to ensuring that threats related to domestic terrorism are effectively communicated to our stakeholders and to ensuring that our SLTT partners have a mechanism to transmit critical information and intelligence to DHS and the IC.

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. In January of this year, 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-Harris 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, this strategy 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 continues 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 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 DHS cannot do this alone. Therefore, the Department embraced 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 First Amendment protections. We are taking several steps to expand our focus on this threat, while ensuring 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; and,
- 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.

The National Strategy recognizes that online narratives espousing attacks on our fellow citizens, institutions, and critical infrastructure are a key factor in driving radicalization and mobilization to violence by some recent lone offenders. DHS shared this threat analyses with our law enforcement partners at every level of government through formal information sharing channels, and with the American public through the NTAS. This year, DHS issued three NTAS bulletins to contextualize the evolving threat landscape for the American people and provide information about how to stay safe.

Intelligence Analysis and Information Sharing

The development and sharing of objective and timely intelligence is the foundation of our work. Therefore, DHS is redoubling efforts to augment intelligence analysis and information sharing capabilities, while also reviewing how to better access and use publicly available information to inform our analysis. I&A has enhanced its ability to analyze, produce, and disseminate products that address DVE threats, including to inform our stakeholders about violent extremist narratives shared via social media and other online platforms. This includes the establishment of a dedicated domestic terrorism branch within I&A that is leading our efforts to combat this threat. Concurrent with the creation of this dedicated team, I&A continues to strengthen partnerships across the Department, including the Office of the General Counsel, the Privacy Office, the Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, and other Intelligence Oversight offices, to ensure protection of privacy, civil rights, and civil liberties through training and the regular review and oversight of DHS intelligence products.

One of the Department's most important missions is to provide actionable intelligence to the broadest audience at the lowest classification level possible. As a result, DHS refocused efforts to augment intelligence and information-sharing capabilities in collaboration with SLTT and private sector partners. This includes publishing and disseminating intelligence bulletins that provide our partners with greater insight into evolving threats, and situational awareness notifications that inform public safety and security planning efforts to prevent violence. I&A will also continue leveraging the National Network of Fusion Centers and our deployed intelligence professionals who collect and analyze threat information alongside SLTT partners to increase timely information-sharing in accordance with applicable law and DHS privacy, civil rights, civil liberties, and intelligence oversight policies.

Partnerships

DHS is fundamentally a department of partnerships. This concept is at the core of what we do, and DHS cannot be successful in countering threats of terrorism without strong partnerships both across the federal government and with the local communities we serve.

In support of partnerships, we increased our collaboration with the FBI, IC, Department of State, and other federal interagency partners to more comprehensively understand and assess the extent of operational relationships between violent extremists in the United States and those operating in other parts of the world. This increased collaboration enhances our ability to detect those DVEs communicating with like-minded individuals overseas, especially those sharing tactics and violent materials, and communicating their intent to commit some type of violent attack; however, these communications usually involve mainly rhetorical support and not operational guidance or direction. This collaboration also improves our watchlisting process, screening and vetting protocols, and travel pattern analyses, to detect and assess travel by known or suspected terrorists.

The Department works closely with industry partners, academia, and faith-based organizations to better understand online narratives associated with domestic terrorism and targeted violence. We also work with technology companies to help inform their development of voluntary, innovative approaches to identify and mitigate violent extremist content under their terms of service and community standards, and to identify effective ways to share threat information, consistent with the law, privacy protections, and civil rights and civil liberties. We are also working to build greater public awareness and resilience to disinformation by developing, evaluating, and sharing digital media literacy tools and critical thinking resources.

No partnership is more important than our SLTT partners who ensure the safety and security of our local communities every day. DHS is only able to execute its mission when we have strong collaboration with our law enforcement and homeland security partners across the country. This is especially true for I&A, which was established in part to fill a void that existed within our Nation's intelligence and information sharing architecture between federal and SLTT partners. In executing this mission, DHS works closely with Homeland Security Advisors in every state and territory to increase the resiliency and preparedness of our communities. Additionally, through our partnership with the National Network of Fusion Centers, DHS deploys personnel to the field to share information on a broad range of threats, including terrorism. DHS remains committed to working closely with SLTT partners, including the sharing of timely and actionable information to ensure our partners have the resources they need to keep our communities safe.

In addition to these actions, DHS continues to look for opportunities to further empower our SLTT and non-governmental partners by providing them with the resources they need to effectively address this national threat. As an example, DHS designated Domestic Violent Extremism as a National Priority Area within the Department's Homeland Security Grant Program for the first time. Additionally, we are looking at opportunities to enhance how other grant programs can be more effectively leveraged to combat domestic violent extremism.

Conclusion

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