

Chairman Carson Opening Remarks
C3 Subcommittee Hearing
Countering Domestic Terrorism Open Hearing
November 3, 2021

The Subcommittee will come to order. Without objection, the Chair may declare a recess at any time.

America is under threat.

According to a joint DHS-FBI report mandated by this Committee, 2019 was “the most lethal year” for domestic violent extremist attacks since 1995 - the year of the Oklahoma City bombing. The majority of those killed in 2019 were killed by extremists “advocating for the superiority of the white race.” By white supremacists.

One year ago, the Acting Secretary of Homeland Security wrote that “white supremacist violent extremists ... have been exceptionally lethal in their abhorrent targeted attacks.”

This past April, the Intelligence Community assessed that “racially motivated violent extremists and militia violent extremists,” including those who advocate for the superiority of the white race, “present the most lethal” domestic threat, and are “most likely to conduct mass-casualty attacks.”

And just a few weeks ago, Assistant Director Langan testified that the FBI is tracking more than 2,700 domestic terrorism threats.

We have seen the devastation of this threat firsthand, in these very halls.

On January 6, the Capitol was attacked by insurrectionists, who attempted to use deadly force to prevent Congress from counting electoral votes from a free and fair election. For the first time since the Civil War, America did not have a peaceful transfer of power.

Five people died that day. Several Capitol Police officers took their lives in the traumatic aftermath. Many more were injured, and still suffer the effects of that assault.

That day affected me, too, in deeply personal ways.

On January 6, a man was arrested returning to his truck from the riot at the Capitol. He was carrying two pistols.¹ In his truck, according to the FBI, was a small arsenal: Eleven Molotov cocktails; a rifle; a shotgun; two 9mm pistols and a .22-caliber pistol, both loaded; as well as a crossbow, several machetes, a stun gun, and smoke devices.²

That man had something else in his truck: a list. My name was on it. Next to my name was written: “one of two Muslims in the House of Rep[resentatives]”.³

¹ United States v. Coffman, 21-CR-00004 (DDC 2021), <https://www.justice.gov/opa/press-release/file/1351661/download>

² Spencer S. Hsu, “Man accused of bringing molotov cocktails, five loaded firearms to Capitol on Jan. 6 set to plead guilty,” *Washington Post*, September 8, 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/legal-issues/lonnie-coffman-molotov-cocktail-capitol-plea/2021/09/08/0f39e3ba-10b6-11ec-bc8a-8d9a5b534194_story.html.

³ Lawrence Andrea, “Man arrested in D.C. with explosives had threatening note mentioning Rep. André Carson,” *Indianapolis Star*, January 12, 2021, <https://www.montgomeryadvertiser.com/picture-gallery/news/2021/01/12/alabama-man-lonnie-coffman-arrested-capitol-riot-evidence-photos/6641611002/>.

As someone who was directly targeted on January 6, this issue is personal for me. As a former law enforcement officer, this issue is personal for me. As a Black man, and a Muslim, this issue is personal for me. As an American, who fights for equity, for democracy, for freedom, this issue is personal for me.

As we work to prevent future attacks, we must remember that domestic terrorism tears at the fabric of this country in ways that extend beyond the lives lost. Kenneth Robinson, pastor of Briar Creek Road Baptist Church in Charlotte, North Carolina told the *Washington Post* in April that his predominantly Black church—one of several attacked in 2015—remains on edge to this day. “Trauma is a way of life for us,” he said.⁴

Trauma cannot—must not—be a way of life for any American.

⁴ Robert O'Harrow Jr., Andrew Ba Tran and Derek Hawkins, “The Rise of Domestic Extremism in America,” *Washington Post*, April 12, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/interactive/2021/domestic-terrorism-data/>.

Domestic terrorism is not new—it arises from hatreds and divisions as old as America. And we are all aware that its victims come disproportionately from minority and marginalized communities. But it is evolving and expanding—fueled by disinformation and amplified on social media. We, too, must evolve to meet this threat.

And to effectively counter this threat, we need to name it. We need to understand it. We need to identify the drivers of domestic terrorism—so that we can stop it.

Equally important to stopping this threat, is *how* we go about preventing it. Fighting terrorist violence is only one side of the ledger—one part of the balance that must be struck. We must ensure that, as we rise to meet the challenge of domestic terrorism, we do so in a way that protects the civil rights and civil liberties.

This is a longstanding challenge in counterterrorism—the need for balance between freedom and security. To maintain that balance, the Intelligence Community’s domestic terrorism mission must remain narrow—and Congress’ oversight must be rigorous.

I am glad—genuinely so—to see my colleagues across the aisle embrace concerns for protecting civil rights and civil liberties in counterterrorism programs that so many of us have expressed for years. This gives me faith that we can work together to strike a balance that protects our cherished values and ensures our nation’s safety *both* by countering the threat, and also by vigilantly imposing guardrails on the government’s response to this threat. America must remain a land of freedom. And no one should live in fear of racist or political violence.

To help the Subcommittee better understand the domestic terrorism threat, today we welcome John Cohen, Senior Official

Performing the Duties of the Under Secretary for Intelligence and Analysis at the Department of Homeland Security and Timothy Langan, Assistant Director for Counterterrorism at the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

We will have questions about the gravity of the threat and your agencies' roles in responding to it.

We will also ask you to help clarify for the American people the limited, but vital role of the Intelligence Community in this mission. When most Americans hear 'intelligence' they think of a CIA officer recruiting spies or an NSA analyst listening to phone calls. Collection on domestic terrorism is, and must remain, different—it consists largely of gathering publicly available information or information gathered in a law enforcement investigation. Analysts then review it to better understand the threat and help policymakers mitigate it.

All of these activities are within boundaries set by law and conducted under the close oversight of Congress. It is the duty of this Committee to ensure these boundaries remain, to guard against the abuses that have occurred in the past.

This Committee is committed to providing your agencies with the resources necessary to keep this country safe; but we are equally committed to ensuring that no Americans' civil rights or liberties are violated in the process.

So, we will ask you today: How are you distinguishing from protected speech on these online platforms, from conduct on the road of escalation to violence? And how are you working with the private sector—and social media companies in particular—to identify, and share information about, these threats, while still protecting individual privacy rights on these platforms?

I am grateful for your presence, and I stand ready and eager to assist in your mission.

I'll now turn to Chairman Schiff for any comments he wishes to make.

[After Chairman Remarks]

I'll now turn to Ranking Member Crawford for any comments he wishes to make.

[After Ranking Member remarks]

Thank you. With that, we will start our hearing. Assistant Director Langan, the floor is yours.

[After the hearing concludes]

Thank you for this important hearing and conversation. We will reach out to your staff with any questions and other follow up items.