



Written Testimony of

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**Confronting Violent White Supremacy (Part VI):
Examining the Biden Administration's Counterterrorism Strategy**

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Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties**

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Chairman Raskin, Ranking Member Mace, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you very much for the opportunity to be here with you today. I appreciate you holding 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 endanger our communities and our way of life, and 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 is and will remain a top priority for DHS.

In the years immediately following 9/11, we focused on foreign terrorists who sought to harm us within our borders and threaten our interests and assets abroad. In partnership with federal agencies spanning 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. We also issued a call for vigilance on the part of local communities and individuals alike.

Following 9/11, terrorism-related threats to the homeland evolved to include homegrown violent extremists (HVE) – individuals inspired primarily by foreign terrorist groups, but not receiving individualized direction from those groups. According to a joint DHS, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) assessment, from 2015 to 2017 in particular, HVEs became the most prominent terrorism-related threat to the homeland. 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. Likewise, through close collaboration with our federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial (SLTT) partners, 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. We are leveraging the infrastructure, processes, and partnerships that grew out of 9/11, and applying those capabilities, and the lessons learned over the past 20 years, to the diverse set of threats we face today.

Terrorism-related threats to the United States continue to evolve. U.S.-based lone actors and small groups of individuals, including both HVEs and domestic violent extremists (DVEs), represent the most significant and persistent threat to our country.

Domestic Violent Extremism

DVE refers to individuals or movements 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. DVEs are motivated by various factors, including racial bias, perceived government overreach, conspiracy theories promoting violence, and unsubstantiated and false narratives about fraud in the 2020 presidential election, among others. The mere 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. DVEs can fit within one or multiple categories of ideological motivation or grievances.

The Intelligence Community (IC) has assessed that DVEs who are motivated by a range of ideologies and galvanized by recent political and societal events in the United States pose an elevated threat to the United States. This assessment is based on a joint report in March 2021 from DHS, the FBI, and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence titled, *Domestic Violent Extremism Poses Heightened Threat in 2021*. The IC assesses that racially or ethnically motivated violent extremists (RMVEs), including those who advocate for the superiority of the white race, and militia violent extremists (MVEs) 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.

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 will remain a threat to the United States. These violent extremists may continue to seek to exploit the COVID-19 pandemic mitigation measures by viewing the 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 that civil

disorder provides opportunities to engage in violence in furtherance of agendas often derived from racial or ethnic bias – 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 will 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.

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 and for DHS specifically. 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 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 will continue 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 will 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 is embracing 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 guaranteed First Amendment protections. We are taking a number of 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.

Threat Prevention

The Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships, or CP3, is leading our efforts to prevent domestic terrorism and targeted violence. The CP3 approach to violence prevention focuses on locally led efforts to leverage community-based partnerships that address early risk factors and ensure individuals receive help before they radicalize to violence. In support of this objective, CP3 will continue to provide financial, educational, and technical assistance, allowing our partners to build and implement these efforts, which we call local prevention frameworks. These frameworks are tailored to each community's unique needs and challenges, and provide concerned community members and organizations with the tools they need to get help to individuals to prevent them from radicalizing to violence. These individuals often exhibit behaviors that are recognizable to

many but are best understood by those closest to them, such as classmates, friends, and family. Through local prevention frameworks, DHS is empowering the public to support early interventions prior to someone engaging in violence.

Our prevention efforts are closely coordinated within DHS as well as with federal interagency partners. By working with the Departments of Justice, Education, Health and Human Services, and State, among others, DHS is driving a whole-of-government approach to building trusted partnerships with the communities we serve. Similarly, we are leveraging these coordination efforts to identify and share best practices and lessons learned, while ensuring that the mistakes of the past are not repeated. For example, we are establishing a CP3 detailee position within DHS' Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties. This approach will ensure full coordination, while avoiding any duplication of effort.

In addition to these efforts, and given the evolving threat landscape and the risks posed by domestic violent extremism, including to our employees and operations, the Secretary directed the Department to initiate a review of how to best prevent, detect, and respond to potential domestic violent extremist threats within DHS. This effort is led by our Office of the Chief Security Officer and includes a review and update of policies and procedures laying out the requirements and mechanisms for reporting insider threats and other actions associated with domestic violent extremism within the Department.

Intelligence Analysis and Information Sharing

The development and sharing of objective and timely intelligence are the foundation for what we do. Therefore, DHS is redoubling our efforts to augment our intelligence analysis and information sharing capabilities, while also reviewing how we can better access and use publicly available information to inform our analysis. DHS' Office of Intelligence and 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 by using sound, timely intelligence. Concurrent with the creation of this dedicated team, I&A has continued to strengthen its partnerships across DHS to ensure the proper protection of

privacy, civil rights, and civil liberties, including the Office of the General Counsel, the Privacy Office, the Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, and other Intelligence Oversight offices 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 has also refocused its efforts to augment its 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

As Secretary Mayorkas has noted in several instances, DHS is fundamentally a department of partnerships. This 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 this, we have 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 will enhance 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. This collaboration will also improve our watchlisting process, screening and vetting protocols, and travel pattern analyses to detect and assess travel by known or suspected terrorists.

The Department is also working closely with industry partners, academia, and faith-based and non-governmental organizations to better understand online narratives associated

with domestic terrorism and targeted violence. We are working 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.