

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

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**Opening Statement**  
**Chairman Jamie Raskin**  
**Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties**  
**“Confronting Violent White Supremacy Part VI: Examining the Biden Administration’s Counterterrorism Strategy”**  
**September 29, 2021**

Good morning everyone. I want to thank our witnesses for joining us today and I want to thank all the Members who have come to participate in this critical hearing.

As you just saw in the video compilation, this hearing is the sixth in a series about the nation’s crisis with violent white supremacy—and the need for the federal government to mount an effective and comprehensive response to this fundamental threat to the safety of the American people and security of the American Republic. This is not just an important hearing, but today’s is a historic hearing because for the first time, an Administration has answered our call to set forth a comprehensive, whole-of-government strategy to deal with the threat.

The Biden Administration took power only two weeks after the January 6 insurrection. That day, the whole world watched the storm troopers of violent white supremacy act as the vanguard of a mass violent political insurrection against the government of the United States that smashed our windows, invaded our Capitol, wounded and injured more than 140 Capitol and MPD officers and left several people dead. The protest that turned into a riot and insurrection had been promoted and incited by the then-President Donald Trump.

The well-trained battalions of domestic violent extremists consisted of Proud Boys, Oath Keepers, Three Percenters, Q-Anon followers, Aryan Nations, Boogaloo Boys, armed militiamen, white Christian nationalists, and other violent extremists. They rallied behind the banner of Donald Trump’s “Big Lie,” asserting that he had won the 2020 presidential election and that it was being stolen from him. In fact, Joe Biden received more than 7 million votes more and won by a margin of 306-232 in the electoral college. And yet Trump’s “Big Lie” unified these disparate violent groups into a mass street movement to “Stop the Steal” and storm the Capitol to interrupt the counting of Electoral College votes for the very first time in the history of the United States, nearly toppling the peaceful transfer of power in our country.

Although warning signs had been popping up everywhere for weeks before the insurrection, federal law enforcement never produced a formal threat assessment about the risks of violence

on that day. That indicates a systematic failure to grapple with the magnitude of the threat facing the Republic.

And let's be clear that the most dangerous domestic terror threat facing America today comes from the forces that attacked our government on January 6<sup>th</sup>. In October 2020, Donald Trump's own Acting Secretary of Homeland Security singled out white supremacist extremists as – quote – “the most persistent and lethal threat in the Homeland.”

Just two days after being sworn in, President Biden ordered federal law enforcement and intelligence officials to study the threat of domestic violent extremism. He understood that a post-9/11 counterterrorism framework, set up primarily to combat international threats like al Qaeda and ISIS, was not designed to address the violence the domestic terror violence threatens us today.

The results of their review became public on June 15, when the President released the *first-ever* National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism. The Strategy outlined four main pillars to guide federal agencies.

First, the Strategy calls for more analysis and information-sharing related to domestic terror threats. Second, it asks agencies to determine how to better prevent domestic terror recruitment and mobilization of violence. Third, it tasks the government with disrupting and deterring domestic terrorism. And fourth, it calls on the government to confront long-term contributors to domestic terror, including racism.

This Strategy offers exactly the kind of coordinated governmental response the members of the Subcommittee have been asking more than two years. During our prior hearings, we were warned over and over again by witnesses with years of counterterrorism experience and federal law enforcement experience that the Trump Administration had no cohesive plan to confront the enormous problem facing us. We learned that the federal government was not devoting sufficient personnel or resources to monitor or confront the white supremacist threat of violence spreading across the globe. In fact, we heard from Trump Administration officials *themselves* that the Administration frankly lacked any strategic plan to prevent or combat white supremacist violence.

With the release of this new Strategy, the Administration has finally ensured that the U.S. has a blueprint to defend ourselves. The Strategy calls for more resources to boost state, local, tribal, and territorial efforts to tackle the threat. This includes more information-sharing; more analysis and data-driven guidance on potential indicators of violence. It also lays out a new, public health-focused framework for terror prevention that will enlist all sectors of government and society to work together as a bulwark against violence and provide an off-ramp for those who are caught up in the clutches of hate.

These sweeping objectives will require enormous implementation efforts, coordination, and oversight. I hope that we can use this hearing to explore how these efforts are already underway and how Congress can help. We should also take this opportunity to discuss how the Administration's strategy will balance its urgent investigative and enforcement priorities with the constant need to uphold the civil rights and civil liberties of all Americans. I am confident that the witnesses before us today will be able to clarify how these counterterror efforts will respect the rule of law and democracy, the democracy we in fact are seeking to protect against terrorist violence.

We are facing an unprecedented situation in which senior political leaders—up to and including the former President—have been actively promoting corrosive, anti-democratic messages that circulate paranoia, cynicism, and violence. This cesspool of conspiracy thinking is activating unstable individuals predisposed because of a mixture of ideological grievances and disappointments, to commit violence. This is a problem that demands the attention of all of us, and indeed, everyone who in the country who believes in the constitutional order. On January 6th, we saw a glimpse of a post-democratic chaotic America. In that violent mob, which stormed the Capitol of the United States, there was no room for civil rights or civil liberties for anyone. Either for the marchers, or for the officers who were being beat up, or the American people, or Congress. There was no room for equal justice under law. There was no room for meaningful dissent.

Our government is finally waking up to the need to combat comprehensively and effectively, white supremacist and militia based violent extremism. I hope that this hearing will bring more clarity and exposure to the Biden Administration's strategic plan and help illuminate what Congress can do to ensure that it is both effective and of course, respectful of civil rights and civil liberties of the people. We must all work together to defend our democracy and our freedom.

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