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House of Representatives

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Opening Statement
Chairman Jamie Raskin (MD-08)
Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties
Hearing: “Confronting Violent White Supremacy (Part IV):
White Supremacy in Blue—The Infiltration of Local Police Departments”
September 29, 2020

Good morning. This is the fourth hearing our Subcommittee has had on the problem of white supremacist violence in America. Since the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, we’ve also held a separate set of briefings on police brutality in communities of color and rampant violations of the First Amendment at civil rights protests, by the Trump Administration.

Today, we’ll examine how these different threats to the American people intersect—namely, how white supremacist organizations, ideas, and attitudes have come to infiltrate and target certain domains of law enforcement.

The bloody trail of violent white supremacy is now splattered across America: Charleston, South Carolina, where white supremacist Dylan Roof slaughtered nine African American parishioners at worship in the Emmanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church. Charlottesville, Virginia, where hundreds of neo-Nazi and Klansmen rioted and wounded dozens of people and killed Heather Heyer in a terrible attack by automobile. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where a neo-Nazi killed eleven people and wounded six at the Tree of Life Synagogue as they worshiped. Poway, California, another anti-Semitic rampage. El Paso, Texas, where a white supremacist hyped up on anti-immigrant hate killed 23 people and wounded 23 others in a rampage at a Walmart.

According to the Anti-Defamation League, 75% of all extremist-related murders between 2009 and 2018 were committed by right-wing extremists. The Center for Strategic Studies, which analyzed over 900 politically motivated attacks in the U.S. since 1994, found that there have been nearly *six times* as many victims of violence from right-wing groups as from others. In 2020, they found that over 90% of political attacks were conducted by right-wing groups. These are the facts.

Like COVID-19, this virus of violent white supremacy is spreading. The Southern Poverty Law Center documented a record 30% increase in the number of hate groups nationwide over the last several years, and hate crimes are also trending up.

But as with COVID-19, the Trump Administration has decided to mislead the public by downplaying the problem. A Department of Homeland Security whistleblower has stated that Ken Cuccinelli told him to “specifically modify” draft language on white supremacy to make “the threat appear less severe,” and to “include information on the prominence of violent ‘left-wing’ groups.”

The spread of violent white supremacy is a threat to everyone, but disproportionately is a threat to Black and Brown communities. But it is also a threat, and purposefully underestimating this problem is a threat, to first responders: in this case, to police officers. According to the Anti-Defamation League, white supremacists and other far right extremist groups have killed 51 police officers since 1990. 83% of shootouts between police and extremists involve right-wing extremists, with white supremacists being responsible for more than half of those.

The unredacted memo we released today from the FBI, states that “white supremacist presence among law enforcement personnel is a concern due to the access they may have to restricted areas vulnerable to sabotage and to elected officials or protected persons that they could see as targets for violence.” White supremacy is a deadly threat to the safety of law enforcement officers as well as to public safety generally.

In May, far right extremists killed David Patrick Underwood, a federal law enforcement officer. One of the Boogaloo boys charged in Underwood’s death is a former Air Force sergeant also suspected in the murder of a Santa Cruz Sheriff earlier this year. In February, a white supremacist killed Officer Nick O’Rear in Alabama.

In 2006, the FBI released an intelligence assessment warning of, quote, “white supremacist infiltration of law enforcement.” The FBI identified two distinct problems. First, the FBI noted the problem of white supremacist *groups* infiltrating law enforcement. We have seen a lot of evidence of that in the fourteen years since the FBI’s assessment, as officers across the country have been dismissed for active membership in the KKK and other similar groups. We will hear testimony about this problem today.

But the FBI also identified a second problem: law enforcement officers who have no formal affiliation with racist groups but who sympathize with their racist ideology. This, too, has been in plain view in this period of resurgent racist violence across America. In 2019, a team of investigative journalists published the Plain View Project, which collected over 5,000 postings displaying white supremacist, xenophobic, misogynistic and violent Facebook material from police officers in eight cities.

We invited the FBI here today. The Bureau refused to come, claiming they have nothing to say because they have no evidence that this is a widespread problem demanding the FBI’s attention. What’s more, they have attempted to disavow their own 2006 intelligence assessment, which has every sign of being an authentic document.

They did provide us an unredacted version of that 2006 assessment, which I am releasing today so the public can better understand how the FBI understood this threat and judge its subsequent actions—or lack thereof—accordingly. The redacted passages include prescient warnings for the American people. The FBI warned that, quote: **“white supremacist infiltration of law enforcement can result in other abuses of authority and passive tolerance of racism within communities served.”** The FBI also cautioned that police officers who are hostile to civil rights might, quote, **“volunteer their professional resources to the white supremacist causes with which they sympathize.”**

These are chilling conclusions, but rather than clearly spell out this threat for the American people, the FBI has suppressed them from public view for *14 years*. For the first time, we can now see that the FBI believed internally that white supremacist infiltration of law enforcement departments was a serious problem, a source of potential abuse of power and authority on the street, and a source of potential violence against the civilian population.

This summer, as the country was shocked to watch videos depicting the brutal and vindictive treatment of Black Lives Matter protesters, other videos emerged of police officers treating armed white militia as friends and as allies. In Salem, Oregon, police gave a polite warning to a group of armed white men asking them to “discreetly stay inside the buildings” after curfew so it would not look like police were “playing favorites”

when they teargassed protesters. In Albuquerque, officers were caught on a police scanner referring to white vigilantes as “armed friendlies.” In Kenosha, Wisconsin, officers pushed protestors towards a group of armed, white civilians. Police offered water to those armed men, one of whom shot and killed two people that night. The shooter, Kyle Rittenhouse, got away, despite walking up to police with his hands in the air, the murder weapon strapped to his chest, while onlookers identified him as the killer of two innocent Americans.

The social contract depends on fair and neutral enforcement of the laws to protect the whole citizenry against criminal violence and state violence. **We must work to disentangle the police power of the state from groups and individuals that subscribe to violent white supremacist ideology and seek to inflict harm on African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinos, Jewish Americans, LGBTQ Americans, and anyone who stands in the way of a race war and the civil war that the extreme right is calling for in America today.** If local or state law enforcement were being infiltrated by ISIS or by Al-Qaeda, or any other terrorist group, we would consider it an immediate public safety emergency. Infiltration by violent white supremacy is no less of a threat and no less urgent. To confront it effectively, we must understand it. That is the purpose of today’s hearing.

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