



Written Testimony of

**John Cohen
Counterterrorism Coordinator and
Assistant Secretary for Counterterrorism and Threat Prevention
Office of Strategy, Policy, and Plans
Department of Homeland Security**

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Racially and Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremism: The Transnational Threat
Before the
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Subcommittee on Intelligence and Counterterrorism**

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Chairwoman Slotkin, Ranking Member Pfluger, 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 and timely hearing.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS or the Department) confronts grave challenges, both seen and unseen, on behalf of the American people. The challenges endanger our communities and our way of life, and include terrorism perpetrated by both foreign and domestic actors. Terrorist and targeted violence threats to the United States have evolved and become more varied since the attacks on September 11, 2001. Combatting terrorism and targeted violence is and will remain a top priority for DHS.

Foreign terrorist organizations (FTO) still have the intent to attack the United States within and from beyond our borders. In the years since September 11, 2001, we have enhanced our ability to identify and prevent individuals affiliated with these organizations from traveling or entering the United States. We have also enhanced security at our airports, ports of entry, and collaboration with our foreign partners to ensure that terrorists never reach our borders.

However, the most significant terrorist threat currently facing our Nation comes from lone offenders and small groups of individuals who commit acts of violence and are motivated by a broad range of violent racial or ethnic biases, political, religious, anti-government, societal, and personal ideological beliefs and grievances – or a combination of these factors. In particular, Domestic Violent Extremism (DVE) represents the most persistent and lethal terrorism-related threat facing the United States today.

When we discuss DVE, we are talking about 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 from a foreign terrorist group or other foreign power. The mere advocacy of political or social positions, political activism, use of strong or offensive

rhetoric, or generalized embrace of violent tactics does not necessarily constitute violent extremism and may be constitutionally protected. DVEs can fit within one or multiple categories of ideological motivation or grievances and can span a broad range of movements.

DVE is 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, such as foreign nation-states or FTOs. 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 and mobilization to violence.

DVE lone offenders will continue to pose significant detection and disruption challenges because of their ability to mobilize discreetly and independently, and access to weapons. The lethality of this threat is evidenced by recent attacks across the United States, including against government buildings and personnel and minority groups. Combatting this violence requires a whole-of-government approach.

As stated in last month's joint report from DHS, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence titled, *Domestic Violent Extremism Poses Heightened Threat in 2021*, the Intelligence Community (IC) assesses 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 in 2021. In particular, Racially or Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremists (RMVEs) 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 and government personnel and facilities.

The IC also assesses that the MVE threat increased last year, in part due to anger over COVID-19 related restrictions. The IC assessment is that this threat will almost certainly continue to be

elevated throughout 2021 because of contentious sociopolitical factors that motivate MVEs to commit violence.

Additionally, RMVEs who promote the superiority of the white race are the DVE actors with the most persistent and concerning transnational connections because individuals with similar ideological beliefs exist outside of the United States. These RMVEs frequently communicate with and seek to influence each other, most often online. Such connectivity with overseas violent extremists might lead to a greater risk of U.S. RMVEs mobilizing to violence, including traveling to conflict zones. In many cases, these DVE actors have spent inordinate amounts of time online, viewing extremist, violent materials, engaging with like-minded individuals, and ultimately, in many cases, communicating their intent to commit some type of violent attack.

In many cases, these RMVEs are inspired by violent extremist narratives or conspiracy theories that are spread online by U.S.-based ideologues, movements, and other individuals, and occasionally by a variety of foreign adversaries. Identifying those involved in destructive, violent, and threat-related behavior is a complex challenge. For example, DVEs may filter or disguise online communications with vague innuendo or coded language to protect operational security, avoid violating social media platforms' terms of service, and appeal to a broader pool of potential recruits. Under the guise of First Amendment-protected activity, DVEs can recruit supporters, and incite and engage in violence. Further complicating the challenge, these groups often migrate to private or closed social media platforms and encrypted channels to obfuscate their activity.

Attacks perpetrated by these actors have targeted a cross-section of our society, including groups targeted for their faith, ethnicity, sociocultural group or profession, as well as government facilities and officials, law enforcement, and even Members of Congress.

Addressing this threat is a top priority for DHS and requires a multi-dimensional approach. The Department has taken a number of steps to expand our focus on this threat, working across the Federal government, with our state and local partners, and with the private sector and non-

government entities, and to ensure all available resources are devoted to combatting DVE. This undertaking requires nothing less than a Department-wide effort, which Secretary Mayorkas has initiated.

- Within the first 30 days of the Secretary's tenure, he designated me as the senior official, to organize, plan, and oversee the Department's operational coordination and response to all terrorism-related threats, including those from DVEs.
- On January 27, 2021, DHS issued a National Terrorism Advisory System (NTAS) Bulletin, highlighting our assessment that domestic violent extremists may be emboldened to act in the wake of the U.S. Capitol breach, and that this threat environment will persist through the near future. The NTAS, which is a public and broadly disseminated product, is a critical tool that DHS will continue to leverage to communicate with the American public and our partners.
- For the first time, DHS designated DVE as a National Priority Area within the Department's Homeland Security Grant Program. This means that in Fiscal Year 2021, state, local, tribal, and territorial governments will spend at least \$77 million to prevent, prepare for, protect against, and respond to domestic violent extremism.

Further, at the direction of Secretary Mayorkas, DHS is redoubling its efforts to augment intelligence analysis and information sharing capabilities and determine how we can better access and use publicly available information to inform our analysis of violent extremist use of social media and other online platforms. The Department is also conducting a review of our posture to counter terrorist threats and targeted violence, and our priority moving forward will include expanding our attention and capabilities in the following areas:

- Intelligence and information-sharing capabilities, particularly with state, local, tribal, and territorial partners.
- Dissemination of intelligence to the broadest audience, at the lowest classification level possible, while protecting privacy, civil rights, and civil liberties of all.
- Increased analytic focus to more comprehensively assess how violent extremist actors and other perpetrators of targeted violence exploit and leverage social media and other online platforms, and how those online activities are linked to real-world violence.

- Enhanced capabilities to conduct threat assessments and apply threat management techniques.
- Enhanced capacity for our stakeholders to implement risk mitigation measures that address the tactics, techniques, and procedures utilized by domestic violent extremists and other perpetrators of targeted violence, such as active shooter, improvised explosive devices, and vehicle ramming attacks.

The Department's Office of Intelligence and Analysis has already initiated some of these efforts through its focus on analyzing and producing products on the trends within the full spectrum of the domestic violent extremism threat landscape. Additionally, the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency continues to provide resources that support community security and resilience, as well as protective measures that organizations can implement to protect facilities and venues.

We have also increased collaboration with the FBI, the IC, and the State Department to more comprehensively understand and assess the growing operational collaboration between violent extremists in the United States and those operating in Europe and other parts of the world. This increased collaboration enhances the watch-listing process, screening and vetting protocols, and travel pattern analysis to detect and assess travel by known violent extremists.

Finally, we are engaging with the tech industry, academia, and non-governmental organizations to better understand online narratives associated with terrorism and targeted violence and how they are spread across the globe. We are looking to more effectively work with these partners; evaluate the emerging narratives, whether they come from an individual DVE, a domestic violent extremist movement, a foreign intelligence service, or an international terrorist organization; assess which of those narratives are most likely to incite or result in an act of terrorism or targeted violence; and work with local communities to most effectively mitigate any risks. This is where our Office for Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention plays an important role through its provision of technical, financial, and educational assistance to establish and expand local prevention frameworks across the Nation.

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before your Subcommittee today, and I look forward to continuing to work with you and other Members of Congress as we address this threat. I look forward to your questions.