



TESTIMONY OF

Alejandro N. Mayorkas
Secretary of Homeland Security

BEFORE

Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate

ON

“DOMESTIC VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN AMERICA”

May 12, 2021

Washington, D.C.

Introduction

Chairman Leahy, Vice Chairman Shelby, and distinguished Members of the Committee,

Thank you very much for the opportunity to join you here today for this important and timely hearing. Every day, the Department of Homeland Security confronts grave challenges, both seen and unseen, that threaten to harm our communities and our way of life. Since the Department was created in the wake of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, terrorist threats to our Nation have evolved and diversified. DHS remains committed to preventing, detecting, and disrupting all forms of foreign and domestic terrorism and targeted violence, consistent with privacy protections, civil rights and civil liberties, and other laws.

The Current Threat Landscape

Foreign terrorist organizations still seek to attack the United States and we remain vigilant in addressing that threat. While doing so, we recognize that the most significant and immediate terrorism-related threat currently facing our Nation is domestic violent extremism.

Domestic violent extremists pose a grave threat to our homeland. They are individuals or groups based and operating primarily within the United States or its territories who seek to further political or social goals through acts dangerous to human life that are in violation of criminal law. These extremists are distinguished from foreign terrorists and homegrown violent extremists in that they are not receiving direction or inspiration from a foreign terrorist group or other foreign power, although foreign actors may amplify or attempt to show support for certain threats. Domestic violent extremists can fit within one or multiple categories of ideological motivation or grievances aligned with a broad range of groups or movements. They often exploit

popular social media platforms, smaller websites with targeted audiences, and encrypted chat applications to recruit new adherents to violent causes, plan and rally support for in-person violent or otherwise criminal actions, and disseminate materials that contribute to radicalization and mobilization to violence.

Domestic violent extremists who are motivated by a range of ideologies and galvanized by recent political and societal events in our country pose an elevated threat to our country, as stated in the recent joint report drafted by DHS, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the National Counterterrorism Center – under the auspices of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence – entitled, *Domestic Violent Extremism Poses Heightened Threat in 2021*. Racially or Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremists (RMVEs) and Anti-Government or Anti-Authority Violent Extremists, specifically Militia Violent Extremists (MVEs), present the most lethal domestic violent extremism threats, with RMVEs most likely to conduct mass-casualty attacks against civilians and MVEs most likely to target law enforcement, government personnel, and government facilities.

Let me be clear: the mere advocacy of political or social positions, political activism, and use of strong rhetoric is constitutionally-protected speech and does not constitute domestic violent extremism. DHS's efforts to combat domestic violent extremism focus on preventing acts of violence.

The danger and lethality of the threat posed by domestic violent extremism is evidenced by the January 6, 2021 attack on the U.S. Capitol and other recent attacks across our country, including against government buildings, federal personnel, and communities of color. Addressing this type of violence therefore requires a whole-of-society approach. Domestic violent extremists who act alone continue to pose significant detection and disruption challenges

because of their capacity for independent radicalization to violence, their ability to mobilize discreetly, and their access to weapons.

Addressing Domestic Violent Extremism

Enhancing our collective ability to prevent all forms of terrorism and targeted violence is a top priority for the Biden-Harris Administration and for DHS specifically. We must make it harder to carry out an attack and we must reduce the potential for loss of life by preventing radicalization and mobilization to violence. The federal government cannot do this alone. As a result, I have directed DHS to embrace a whole-of-society approach to combatting domestic terrorism and targeted violence by building trust, partnerships, and collaboration across every level of government, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, and the communities we serve. We can only combat domestic terrorism and targeted violence if we work together.

In January, we designated a senior official to organize, plan, and oversee the Department's operational coordination and response to all terrorism-related threats, including those posed by domestic violent extremists. That same month, DHS released a National Terrorism Advisory System (NTAS) Bulletin highlighting the threat posed by domestic violent extremists. It was the first NTAS issued in over a year and also the first NTAS to focus solely on a domestic threat. Further, I designated domestic violent extremism as a "National Priority Area" within the Department's Homeland Security Grant Program for the first time.

This means that in Fiscal Year 2021, state, local, tribal, and territorial (SLTT) governments will spend at least \$77 million to prevent, protect against, and respond to domestic violent extremism.

Objective and timely intelligence is the foundation for so much of what we do. That is why DHS's Office of Intelligence & Analysis (I&A) is enhancing its ability to analyze, produce,

and disseminate products that address the full spectrum of terrorism and targeted violence. We have established a dedicated domestic terrorism branch within I&A to ensure we develop the expertise necessary to combat this threat by using sound, timely intelligence. I&A will also continue leveraging the National Network of Fusion Centers and our more than 120 deployed intelligence professionals who collect and analyze threat information alongside SLTT and private sector partners to increase timely information-sharing in accordance with applicable law and DHS privacy, civil rights, and civil liberties policies.

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 is redoubling 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.

More than 240,000 dedicated DHS employees carry out our Department's mission to safeguard the American people, our homeland, and our values every day. It is among my top priorities to ensure our personnel feel safe and secure at work, and the fabric of our Department is not penetrated by hateful acts or violent extremism. In light of the dynamic threat environment and my commitment to protecting our workforce and the people we serve, I announced last month an internal review to address potential threats related to domestic violent extremism within DHS. As we work to safeguard our Nation, we must be vigilant in our efforts to identify and combat domestic violent extremism within both the broader community and our

own organization. This review will help ensure that domestic violent extremism does not compromise our ability to keep our communities safe and secure.

We also are increasing our efforts to more comprehensively assess how domestic violent extremists exploit and leverage social media and other online platforms, and how those online activities are linked to real-world violence. I have directed our experts to enhance the Department's ability to assess and respond to the risk of violence posed by those who are inspired by domestic violent extremist narratives. DHS is also executing a Department-wide effort to ensure operational coordination and establish common standards and processes so that we are able to fully integrate information in the public domain into our aggregate threat analysis in a manner consistent with the law.

In the coming months, the Department will increase training options and other support to help identify individuals at risk of radicalizing to violence. DHS's Federal Emergency Management Agency, U.S. Secret Service, and Federal Law Enforcement Training Centers will provide training to SLTT law enforcement partners on topics such as the use of crisis intervention teams and multidisciplinary threat assessment and management teams to prevent terrorism and targeted violence. I&A's National Threat Evaluation and Reporting program will also continue providing our partners with training and enhanced information sharing capabilities through the Nationwide Suspicious Activity Reporting Initiative and other behavioral threat assessment training, which is designed to assist in the identification and evaluation of potential threats.

Expanding our Partnerships

As I have said before, the Department of Homeland Security is fundamentally a department of partnerships. DHS will remain focused on strengthening its partnerships with the

communities we serve to enhance our targeted violence and terrorism prevention capabilities nationwide. A core component of this effort is empowering our partners to identify and build resilience to the false and harmful narratives that can incite violence and are often spread through social media and other online platforms.

We have increased our collaboration with the FBI, Intelligence Community, and Department of State to more comprehensively understand and assess the extent of operational collaboration between violent extremists in the United States and those operating in other parts of the world. This increased collaboration will 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, including to solicit input on how best to address this threat. 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 generalized 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.

Preventing potential violence requires DHS to work closely with every local community across our country. That is why we are engaged in multiple, complimentary efforts to raise public awareness about both the indicators of terrorism and how to report related activities. We

are updating existing programs like the “If You See Something, Say Something[®]” campaign and Nationwide Suspicious Activity Reporting (SAR) Initiative to ensure they are appropriately designed and implemented in a dynamic threat environment.

We are also elevating our main effort to prevent domestic terrorism and targeted violence through community partnerships. The new Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships, or CP3, will replace the Office for Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention, while ensuring our prevention efforts are grounded in an approach to violence prevention that leverages behavioral threat assessment and management tools and addresses early-risk factors that can lead to radicalization to violence. CP3 will continue to expand financial, educational, and technical assistance to SLTT partners to build local prevention frameworks tailored to each community’s unique needs and challenges. These frameworks will provide concerned community members and organizations with the tools they need to help individuals who may be radicalizing, or have radicalized, to violence as these individuals typically exhibit behaviors that are recognizable to many, but are best understood by those closest to them, such as classmates, friends, and family.

The Department’s CP3 will work closely with federal partners such as the Departments of Education and Health and Human Services to drive a whole-of-society approach to building trusted partnerships across all levels of government, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, and the communities we serve. In the coming months, CP3 will also launch a nationwide public outreach campaign designed to provide practical information on how to participate in local prevention efforts. This campaign will be similar to DHS’s Blue Campaign, which has successfully raised public awareness about and driven action toward combatting human trafficking.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today and for this Committee'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.