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HEARING

"MEETING THE CHALLENGE OF WHITE NATIONALIST TERRORISM AT HOME AND ABROAD"

The Committee on Foreign Affairs' Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and International Terrorism and the Committee on Homeland Security's Subcommittee on Intelligence and Counterterrorism

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Chairman Rose, Chairman Deutch, Chairman Thompson, Ranking Member Walker, Ranking Member Wilson, and Members of the Committee: I would like to thank you for your service to our country and for calling attention to the critical threat from global white nationalist terrorism. I am honored to be here.

My name is Cynthia Miller-Idriss, and I am Professor of Education and Sociology at the American University here in Washington, D.C. I am also Director of Outreach and Senior Fellow at the Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right (CARR) in the United Kingdom. I have been studying the dynamics of global white supremacist extremism for over twenty years. I have written two books focused on Germany (*Blood and Culture* and *The Extreme Gone Mainstream*). My remarks today on the global rise of white supremacist extremism draw on those years of empirical research in Germany as well as from my new book, *Hate in the Homeland*, which focuses primarily on the U.S.[1] I want to acknowledge the support of several research assistants for this work, most notably Mr. Brian Hughes, whose assistance was invaluable in preparing my testimony today.

Today's focus is on white nationalist terrorism, which I view as a subset of the broader phenomenon of white supremacist extremism. I will use both terms interchangeably to refer to an ideology that calls for lethal and mass violence as a solution to a supposed existential threat posed to whites from demographic change and immigration. White supremacist extremism is currently at a record high, in terms of recognized hate organizations, number of violent attacks, and the spread of its propaganda. The pace of all these dangers is provably increasing. I urge this Congress to take seriously this clear and pressing danger to the safety of the American public and the harmony of our nation.

White supremacist extremism is currently the most lethal form of extremism in the U.S. White supremacist extremists were responsible for at least 50 deaths in 2018—the fourth-deadliest year since 1970 in terms of domestic extremist deaths—with the majority of those deaths linked to white supremacy specifically.[2] There have been over 100 deaths in the U.S. and Canada at the hands of white supremacist extremists since 2014.[3] White supremacist extremism has grown dramatically in terms of its organization. The number of hate groups in the U.S. is currently at a record high. White nationalist groups alone increased by 50% in 2018, increasing from 100 to 148.[4]

The pace of white nationalist terror attacks is also rapidly increasing. In the four weeks after the El Paso shooting that killed 22 people, 40 individuals were arrested for plotting mass shootings, a dozen of which were definitively linked to white supremacist ideology.[5] Even before El Paso, domestic terrorism incidents were outpacing numbers from previous years. FBI Director Christopher Wray testified in July 2019 that his agency had made about 100 arrests related to domestic terrorism in the first three-quarters of the 2019 fiscal year, noting that a majority of those arrests were related to white supremacy.[6]

The U.S. has also seen a significant rise in white supremacist propaganda, recruiting, and activism. The Anti-Defamation League reported a rise in white supremacist recruiting over the first five months of 2019, along with a steady rise in propaganda tactics and increasing hate crimes.[7] This comes on the heels of a 182% increase in white supremacist propaganda incidents from 2017 to 2018, when 1,187 cases were reported.[8] This propaganda is not limited to any single group. The hundreds of documented instances of white supremacist and white nationalist propaganda documented in 2018 came from at least ten separate national 'alt-right,' white supremacist and neo-Nazi groups.[9]

U.S. resources in the fight against terrorism have not been adjusted sufficiently to meet this challenge. In recent Congressional testimony, FBI officials noted that 80% of their counterterrorism field agents focus on international terrorism cases and 20% focus on domestic terrorism. The imbalance in resources is consequential. While the FBI was able to stop 70% of terrorist activities from Islamist groups or individuals in 2018, over 71% of white supremacist extremists have been able to carry out their plans for violent attacks during the same period.[10] We are also hampered by definitional challenges. The FBI now uses the term 'racially-motivated violent extremism' to encompass both white supremacist groups as well as what they previously labeled 'black identity extremists.'[11] This is also complicated by a distinction that the US federal government currently draws between international and domestic terrorism. The category of international terrorism includes a sub-category of 'homegrown violent extremists' inside the United States who are understood to be radicalized by a global ideology. But there is currently no such category for domestic terrorism, which is understood as comprised of "individuals who commit violent criminal acts in furtherance of ideological goals stemming from domestic influences, such as racial bias and anti-government sentiment."[12] This distinction runs the risk of overlooking the many ways that white nationalist terrorism, especially today, is globally networked and intertwined.

Understanding the Ideology. White supremacist extremism is a global ideology that espouses norms, values and beliefs that are fundamentally counter to the principles and health of our nation, including aims like the establishment of white ethno-states, the re-migration and deportation of non-whites or non-Europeans, and the reduction of rights for ethnic minorities. It is hierarchical and exclusionary, establishing clear lines of superiority and inferiority according

to race, ethnicity, and nationality, and de-humanizing groups of people who are deemed to be inferior. These beliefs are used to justify violence by individuals or groups who hold a sense of perceived superiority over other groups of people.[13] Many of these exclusionary ideologies are tied to changing patterns of immigration and demographic transformation, meaning that white identity and the need for its protection and defense is a common thread across white supremacist and white nationalist beliefs and practices.

White supremacist extremists do not only express exclusionary and de-humanizing ideologies, but also embed those ideologies within a racist framework of existential threat to whites as a dominant group. White nationalist terrorists rely on three overlapping dystopian fantasy theories: the 'Great Replacement' (used globally), white genocide (used predominantly in the U.S.) and Eurabia (used predominantly in Europe). All three theories are based on a paranoid belief in an invasion of immigrants, Muslims, or Jews who will eradicate or replace white, Christians, Americans or Europeans. These scenarios rely on a sense of white victimhood and are frequently tied to emotional appeals to protect, defend, and take heroic action to restore sacred national space, territory, and homelands.

The Great Replacement is a white supremacist conspiracy theory about demographic change. It claims that there is an intentional, global plan orchestrated by national and global elites to replace white, Christian, European populations with non-white, non-Christian ones.[14] Great Replacement-type theories seek to create a sense of urgency and call whites to action. They foster transnational inspiration and a sense of shared mission among global white nationalists and white supremacists, who see themselves as facing a common demographic threat. They have already inspired mass terrorist violence by white supremacist extremists,

including the 2011 mass shooting in Norway[15], the murder of 51 Muslim worshippers in Christchurch, the El Paso shooting[16] and the Pittsburgh synagogue shooting.

White nationalist terrorists believe that the only way to prevent the ultimate genocide of white populations by non-white immigrants is through an apocalyptic race war which will result in a rebirth into a new world order and a restored white civilization.[17] This is a strikingly similar ideology to the Islamist extremist effort to restore the Caliphate—in this sense, Islamist and white nationalist terrorists share a similar apocalyptic vision and use the same kinds of violent terrorist strategies in an effort to accelerate the process toward the end times. This becomes particularly relevant for what is known as reciprocal radicalization or cumulative extremism—acts of terror committed as revenge or in response to terrorist acts from the 'other side.'[18]

White nationalist terrorists not only believe that a violent apocalypse is coming, but also that the best and fastest way to reach the phase of racial rebirth is to accelerate the path to the apocalypse and eventual new civilization by speeding up polarization and societal discord as a way of undermining social stability overall. Violence is foundational to this approach, because violent acts create immediate societal panic, inspire copycat actors, and encourage reciprocal or revenge terror attacks from affected groups. For this reason, each violent act of terror is viewed as heroic, celebrated in the name of the global cause, and is understood to bring white supremacists one step further toward the end-times collapse and subsequent restoration of a new white civilization.[19] This principle—acceleration—is a key aspect motivating terrorist violence from white supremacist extremists and white nationalist terrorists globally.

Youth Radicalization. Youth are attracted to this ideology in part for how it channels grievances and personal trauma into anger, blame, and resistance, but also because it offers a

sense of meaning, purpose, and a way to engage heroically with a brotherhood of warriors who seek to save the white race from an imminent threat. The radicalization process is complex, often taking part to a large extent online. Exposure to exclusionary and dehumanizing ideologies is only part of the story. People are drawn to those beliefs because of how they feel. Research has shown that white nationalist and white supremacist extremist ideologies are especially attractive to people who have experienced some form of personal trauma or economic instability and the set of emotions that surround that experience—including anger, resentment, humiliation, a desire for change, nostalgia for the past, a wish to belong to something bigger than oneself and the chance to enact a sense of purpose. There is some evidence that a sense of betrayal by the government or mainstream society can also play a role.[20] Structural inequalities like poverty do not typically motivate white nationalist terrorist engagement directly, but structural inequality is an indirect cause of radicalization, as it becomes articulated into grievances against the state, ethnic minorities, women or others. One common expression is when individuals experience what is called relative deprivation, feeling deprived of the successes they had anticipated achieving. This can lead to what scholars call aggrieved entitlement, referring to the individual's sense that they deserve something better than their current lot, that someone else is to blame for their own perceived inequality, and that violence is an acceptable response to this experience of personal harm.[21]

White supremacist extremists were early adopters of the internet and have quickly capitalized on new media's ability to broaden recruitment and exposure to political ideologies beyond physical spaces and published materials.[22] New social media platforms created a sudden ease with which propaganda and marketing materials could be distributed, circulated, re-tweeted, shared, and connected with the mainstream.[23] Today there is a broad new tech and media

ecosystem for white nationalist and white supremacist communication, dissemination, and mobilization. Unmoderated, fringe platforms pose a particular problem, where the concentration of extreme views (combined with a lack of moderate ones), along with the kind of heightened polarization brought on by the relative anonymity of social media and the lack of oversight on unregulated sites make them especially ideal places to incubate and radicalize individuals.[24]

Global Connections. White nationalists are globally interconnected in at least five expanding areas:

- Increased crowdsourcing online, enabling more fundraising and growing financial interconnections[25];
- Increased sharing of tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs) for attacks and other support activities, potentially contributing to more attacks as well as greater lethality and propaganda promotion;
- Increased cross-national recruitment for combat. For example, Ali Soufan testified before the House Committee on Homeland Security on September 10, 2019 that over 17,000 fighters from Western countries- including many from the U.S.- have traveled to Ukraine to fight, mostly for white supremacist groups[26];
- Increased sharing of manifestos and livestreamed attacks, driving more inspiration from terrorist attacks globally; and
- Increased global gateways to extremist youth scenes in cultural realms like music festivals and combat sports tournaments, which contribute to more networked relationships.

Social media and online modes of communication are key to supporting all five of these global strategies, and are essential to the radicalization pathways of youth in particular. As the Southern Poverty Law Center's Lecia Brooks testified before Congress in June 2019, "entire online spaces … exist solely to provide training and advice" for global audiences of white supremacist extremists, along with source material to intensify ideology and places to celebrate violent attacks.[27] Subcultural scenes enhance these online global interconnections by bringing together youth across borders in-person to meet up at music festivals, conferences, mixed martial arts tournaments, and festivals associated with or linked to white supremacist scenes. Importantly, while online spaces and modes of communication facilitate these cooperative engagements and have significantly reduced burdens to transnational collaboration, they are not the root cause of the collaboration—rather, those collaborations are motivated by shared, global ideologies based in common understandings about a threat to white civilizations from immigration and demographic change.

Conclusion

White supremacist extremism is a growing and evolving global threat. The trends I describe above—which clearly document an escalation in murders, violent attacks, hate crimes, increases in the number of arrests and thwarted attacks, rising propaganda and increased recruiting from white supremacist groups, along with evidence of multiple strategies enhancing cross-national collaboration and transnational terrorist inspiration—provide the best indication of the rising threat of white nationalist terrorism and white supremacist extremism in the U.S. and globally. We also know that white supremacist extremism will almost certainly continue to get worse in the years to come, as we face an unstable and highly-contested election season,

disinformation campaigns, and the insufficiency of single-platform bans to curtail hate clusters from re-forming on alternative social media sites. We can also anticipate increasing migration from ongoing international instability and climate-driven refugees, making the issue of immigration and demographic change an ongoing theme for white nationalists and white supremacist extremists.

There are steps that Congress can take to address this growing threat. We need improved interagency coordination, a rethinking of the division between international and domestic terrorism, and paths for cross-national collaboration with our allies. Federal and local law enforcement need resources and direction. We need improved national research capacity and expertise. And we need pathways to support local community engagement, communication, and preventative education.

Young people need a pathway to make a difference and become heroes, ways to enact meaning in their lives and have a meaningful sense of purpose. If we don't find ways to offer that to them, others will. We need proactive, preventative approaches that involve local communities at all levels. This cannot be only the purview of national security but also of local and community engagement. We need collaborative ways of working with governors, mayors, local law enforcement, local educators, parents, and religious leaders. We need strategies that will combat polarization and improve co-existence among young people so that we reduce vulnerabilities to extremist rhetoric that blames others and channels their grievances into violent action.

For the safety and security of our nation but also for the well-being of all of the youth, families and local communities you represent, I urge this Congress to act to not only prevent violent terrorist attacks but also to interrupt radicalization pathways before they begin.

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[3] Lecia Brooks' June 2019 Congressional testimony notes 81 murders since 2014. The deaths of 22 people in El Paso in August 2019 put this number above 100, without counting other attacks still under investigation. See "Testimony of Lecia Brooks, Southern Poverty Law Center, Before the Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties Committee on Oversight and Reform. United States House of Representatives, June 4, 2019 hearing entitled "Confronting White Supremacy (Part II): Adequacy of the Federal Response." Available at: https://docs.house.gov/meetings/GO/GO02/20190604/109579/HHRG-116-GO02-Wstate-BrooksL-20190604.pdf

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[6] See video clip from Wray's July 23, 2019 testimony where he made this point in response to a question from Senator Dick Durban, at https://thehill.com/homenews/administration/454338-fbis-wray-says-majority-of-domestic-terrorism-arrests-this-year.

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