

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD

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“Racially and Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremism: The Transnational Threat”

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Chairwoman Slotkin, Ranking Member Pfluger, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the invitation to appear before you today. I am here today to discuss the international dimensions of what we call “Racially or Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremism,” or “REMVE,” and the State Department’s ongoing efforts to address this persistent and growing transnational threat.

Just last month, we commemorated the second anniversary of the terrible attacks on two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, where on March 15, 2019, a 28-year-old Australian national gunned down 51 people – a horror that was preplanned to be livestreamed and amplified by supporters on the internet for the world to see. Just before the attack, the perpetrator posted online a lurid and deranged 74-page manifesto. His writing revealed a violent racist and white supremacist worldview, expressing rage that immigration flows and demographic changes were purportedly causing what he referred to as the “replacement of the white race” around the world.

This massacre in Christchurch was shocking, but, unfortunately, it wasn’t unique. The attacker made clear in his screed that he was inspired by others who shared similar twisted views and had conducted similar attacks, including the individual who massacred nearly 80 people in Oslo, Norway, in 2011. Indeed, from Christchurch and Pittsburgh to Quebec City and Hanau, we have seen an escalation in violence perpetrated by REMVE actors around the world. And we have seen ample evidence that those individuals are increasingly interconnected, often – but not only - online.

This is why the Biden-Harris Administration has made it a top priority to counter racially or ethnically motivated violent extremism, particularly violent white supremacist ideology. To kick off this effort, the National Security Council (NSC) staff is leading a comprehensive review of the Domestic Violent Extremism landscape, including REMVE, with the goal of building a strategic framework to address this threat. Assistant Secretary Cohen will discuss the domestic dimensions of REMVE; in the time I have before you today, I wish to focus on the international and transnational dimensions of this threat.

Understanding the “REMVE” Threat

I’d like to begin with a brief overview of the threat landscape. The State Department is using the term REMVE for attacks perpetrated by individuals and groups aiming to advance a broader political agenda to defend against what they perceive as a threat to their racial or ethnic identity. REMVE often encompasses individuals and groups driven by an intolerant and ethno-supremacist ideology, with “white identity terrorism” the largest component of the REMVE landscape. REMVE actors engage in violence or the plotting of violence targeting: immigrants; people of other races; Jewish, Muslim, or other ethnic or religious groups; LGBTQI+ persons, governments; and other perceived enemies. While the U.S. Government uses the term “REMVE,” partner governments, NGOs, and others use a variety of terms to describe facets of this threat, including “far right terrorism,” “extreme right-wing terrorism,” “white identity terrorism,” and/or “white supremacist terrorism.”

Between 2015 and 2020, the UN Security Council's Counterterrorism Committee tracked a 320 percent increase in “extreme right-wing terrorism” globally. In recent years, deadly REMVE attacks have occurred in Canada, France, Germany, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States, among other countries. In Singapore, authorities recently arrested a 16-year-old male who was inspired by the Christchurch attacker and planned to attack two mosques on the anniversary of that horrendous event. This was a rare and isolated incident for the country, demonstrating the reach of these pernicious ideologies. Violent white supremacist and neo-Nazi groups have also become increasingly prominent and vocal in a number of Western countries, with a corresponding rise in attacks.

To effectively tackle the threat posed by REMVE actors, we need to understand the motivations and ideologies that fuel the horrific crimes they commit. The ongoing misuse of today’s digital platforms can connect REMVE individuals and groups to a broad range of conspiracy theories, mis- and disinformation, and violent extremist ideologies, many of which may be protected speech under the First Amendment. While these informal online communities make it difficult to encapsulate one overarching REMVE narrative, REMVE ideologies often encompass anti-Semitism, drawing extensively from Nazi-era propaganda. REMVE actors are frequently influenced by works of hate and paranoia that provide an ideological framework for their violent actions. These narratives fuel a call to action by fomenting a perverse fear of “white genocide,” and feed into other exclusionary narratives globally.

It’s also important to understand how REMVE individuals and groups organize and operate. In some aspects, REMVE actors function similarly to Islamist terrorists, such as members of al-Qa’ida, ISIS, and Hizballah. Like Islamist terrorists, REMVE actors are part of a global and interconnected online community. They exploit the internet to propagandize, radicalize, recruit, and inspire individuals, incite violence, raise funds, organize training, plot attacks, and broadcast their attacks worldwide. But in other important respects, REMVE actors tend to operate differently. Unlike ISIS or al Qa’ida, REMVE actors often have a more diffuse organizational structure. Most do not have clear leadership or command and control structures to coordinate attacks—or clear membership or affiliation. They also often lack a physical safe haven or territory they control where they can operate with complete impunity.

While many attacks by individuals and groups are self-funded, REMVE actors do raise money from a variety of licit and illicit sources, including merchandise and music sales, donations from individuals, criminal activity such as narcotics and weapons trafficking and selling counterfeit goods, and providing military-style training to other extremists. In contrast with Islamist terrorists, who often rely on informal financial institutions and networks, REMVE groups often use formal financial institutions, such as banks and monetary transmitters, to move funds domestically and internationally. Several REMVE groups are also known to use crowdfunding platforms and virtual currency to solicit donations and effect money transfers.

The U.S. government is deeply concerned about the extent of the transnational links between REMVE actors worldwide. REMVE actors often communicate through mainstream social media platforms, anonymous online message boards, online gaming platforms, smaller websites with targeted audiences, and end-to-end encrypted chat applications, often using coded language and symbols. Through these avenues, REMVE groups across the ideological spectrum fundraise, communicate, recruit, radicalize, and inspire others to violence. They also share practical information about how to establish and run training facilities, procure fraudulent travel documents, fabricate explosives and obtain weapons, and clandestinely move people and materiel. As a result, many REMVE attacks are carried out by lone actors with no affiliation to a single group, who are inspired by a transnational REMVE movement or movements with adherents around the globe who connect virtually online. Part of this phenomenon includes violent white supremacists traveling overseas to train and fight with likeminded individuals in foreign conflict zones. U.S.-based REMVE actors have also been known to communicate with and travel abroad to engage in person with foreign REMVE actors, primarily in Europe and in countries such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and South Africa.

Countering the “REMVE” Threat

The United States is taking concrete and specific actions to counter the complex and evolving REMVE threat worldwide. Before I outline the State Department’s efforts, let me first say a word about the whole-of-government approach the Administration is bringing to this fight. Domestically, the FBI and the Department of Homeland Security have the lead in protecting the homeland from this threat and investigating cases of DVE, including those involving REMVE. In turn, the State Department’s role begins at our borders and extends internationally. We work closely with interagency partners, including the FBI, DHS, the Department of Justice, the Department of Treasury, U.S. Agency for International Development, and the U.S. Intelligence Community, and use tools similar to those we have effectively used against terrorist threats, such as those posed by ISIS and al-Qa’ida.

To bring all our counterterrorism tools to the fight against REMVE, the Secretary formally designated the CT Coordinator on February 24, 2021 to coordinate the Department’s global efforts to counter “white identity terrorism,” fulfilling a requirement in the Fiscal Year 2021 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). To that end, the State Department is proactively coordinating with our diplomatic posts, interagency partners, academic entities, and other relevant stakeholders to better understand and address “white identity terrorism” and the broader REMVE threat. We are also collaborating with interagency partners to develop a Department strategy to counter REMVE abroad, and we have contracted a Federally Funded Research and

Development Center (FFRDC) to conduct an independent study to map global connections between REMVE actors, in line with the NDAA.

Countering Terrorist Financing and Travel

The State Department has a broad range of tools to counter REMVE. First, the State Department utilizes our counterterrorism-related designation authorities to counter the REMVE threat. In April 2020, we designated the Russian Imperial Movement (RIM), a group that provides paramilitary-style training to neo-Nazis and white supremacists, and three of its leaders as Specially Designated Global Terrorists (SDGTs). In August 2016, two Swedish men traveled to St. Petersburg and underwent 11 days of paramilitary-style training provided by RIM. A few months later, these men and another individual conducted a series of terrorist attacks in Gothenburg, Sweden. Designating RIM was an unprecedented step – it was the first time the United States has designated a foreign white supremacist organization as an SDGT. This action was enabled by the September 2019 amendments to Executive Order 13224, expanding State’s ability to designate leaders of terrorist groups or those that participate in terrorist training.

We will not hesitate to continue using our counterterrorism-related designation authorities against all terrorist and violent extremist groups, regardless of ideology, as appropriate. The State Department actively assesses REMVE groups and/or individuals abroad, including for potential designation under our authorities. An important limitation is the availability of sufficient credible information that meets standards for those designations. Nonetheless, we will continue to actively review all credible sources of information to assess whether foreign REMVE groups and/or individuals meet the criteria for designation under States’ authorities.

Second, we play a leading role in preventing terrorist travel, including by REMVE actors. The State Department is actively encouraging partner governments to nominate REMVE actors, as appropriate, into their own national watchlists as well as international law enforcement platforms, including that of INTERPOL. We also continue to negotiate and implement bilateral terrorism screening arrangements with select foreign partners, which allows us to exchange watchlist identities with those partners. These efforts augment both U.S. and foreign partners’ border screening systems. Continuing an effort that dates to 9/11, the State Department is also taking steps to bolster the biometric and traveler targeting border security capabilities of key international partners, including in Europe. These initiatives provide capacity that enables partner nations to better identify and disrupt terrorist travel, including that of REMVE actors.

Diplomatic Engagement and Public Diplomacy

Third, through diplomatic engagement via our embassies abroad, the State Department has emphasized to our foreign partners that this issue is a priority for the Biden-Harris Administration, and encouraged increased information sharing on this critical subject. To underscore this message, in March, we sent a global demarche to all of our posts highlighting this administration’s focus on these issues, and seeking information from all of our partners on REMVE. We have been hearing back from our partners that REMVE is a serious concern and a top priority for many of them as well, and they are eager to bolster cooperation and collaboration in this area. We are also engaging our foreign partners, as well as technology sector and civil society partners, through multilateral venues, such as the Council of Europe (CoE), the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF), the industry-led Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism

(GIFCT), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Hedayah (the CVE Center based in Abu Dhabi), and the United Nations (UN), on REMVE. In October 2020, for example, we partnered with Germany and the United Kingdom to convene a virtual event at the United Nations General Assembly to improve information sharing between partner nations and explore REMVE actors' transnational linkages. On April 21 and earlier today, the United States participated in high-level virtual dialogues on REMVE under the banner of the GCTF – a gathering of 30 like-minded partners from across the globe. We are also co-leading with Germany a new Financial Action Task Force (FATF) initiative to counter REMVE financing.

Fourth, public diplomacy is an effective tool in preventing and countering REMVE. We are leveraging existing international platforms, such as the Strong Cities Network (SCN) and the City Pair Program, to build the capacity of local governments from Australia to Canada to address the REMVE threat. In October 2021, the SCN will bring local and national government officials from the Czech and Slovak Republics together to discuss strategies for preventing and countering REMVE. And in December 2021, representatives of the German cities of Halle and Rostock will visit Atlanta and Savanna for a REMVE-focused City Pair Program, which is a two-way exchange program we created in 2014 to help cities address the flow of foreign terrorist fighters to Syria and Iraq. We do this in close partnership with DHS's Office of Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention (TVTP). Through the State Department's International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP), we have also introduced international government and law enforcement officials to strategies used by the U.S. Government and private sector to prevent attacks on public gathering places and other soft targets, such as houses of worship, which can be targeted by REMVE actors. The State Department also funds programs related to democracy, pluralism, human rights, and tolerance to prevent and counter recruitment and radicalization to violence related to REMVE. For instance, we support the participation of French universities in the "Peer to Peer: Countering Hate and Intolerance" program, which empowers university students to develop online and offline messaging campaigns to counter REMVE and anti-Semitic narratives in their communities.

We have also increased awareness among foreign audiences by amplifying the testimony of "formers" through speaker programs. These are individuals who were previously involved in REMVE, have realized the error of their ways, and are now uniquely qualified to dissuade others from becoming radicalized to violence. In December 2019, just ahead of COVID-19, we sent a former neo-Nazi to Austria and Belgium to share insights about his radicalization and deradicalization journeys, and to discuss his community-based rehabilitation and reintegration programs for REMVE actors. Through the first-hand accounts of "formers," our allies are better understanding the nature of REMVE and developing more tailored strategies to confront this threat.

Engagement with the Tech Sector

Fifth, the State Department engages with the international community and tech companies in the vitally important effort to counter the use of the internet by REMVE actors for terrorist purposes. The reliance of REMVE actors on online platforms to radicalize, recruit, communicate and organize to violence makes this line of effort particularly consequential. We have shaped and mobilized international support on two high-level calls for action: the *G20 Osaka Leaders' Statement on Preventing Exploitation of the Internet for Terrorism and Violent Extremism*

Conducive to Terrorism (VECT) and the *G7 Biarritz Strategy for an Open, Free, and Secure Digital Transformation*. These documents reflect and protect important American values, such as freedom of speech. We have long held and continue to believe that the most effective remedy for objectionable speech isn't censorship; it's -more engagement. As a result, these documents uphold freedom of expression by promoting credible alternative rhetoric rather than endorsing approaches that rely on coercing ideologues into silence. In addition, Osaka and Biarritz stress the importance of voluntary, collaborative efforts with the tech sector over regulation that threatens the innovation that has made the internet an engine of prosperity, creativity, and connectivity.

The State Department, in partnership and coordinating with other departments and agencies such as the National Counterterrorism Center, also has engaged tech companies to voluntarily share information on terrorist trends and tactics and encouraged tech companies to consider voluntarily removing REMVE-related content when appropriate by enforcing their respective terms of service that forbid the use of their platforms for terrorist purposes while maintaining full respect for the right to freedom of expression. For example, following the designation of RIM as an SDGT, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Google/YouTube decided to remove RIM accounts and content from their platforms. This was an important step, though government designations are not required for companies to be able to take action against bad actors on their platforms.

Foreign Partners' Capacity Building

Finally, the State Department is beginning to use our foreign assistance funding to build foreign partners' capacity to address the REMVE threat. In October 2020, we supported the International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law (IJJ) in launching a new initiative focused on how criminal justice practitioners can address REMVE. This initiative, which we co-led with the United Kingdom, gathered more than 40 policymakers and practitioners from 19 countries to develop a good practices guide with concrete steps to confront this threat. Influenced by the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) principles, the guide includes good practices on the types of counterterrorism tools and legislation countries should consider to effectively tackle the REMVE threat, and how criminal justice actors should work with non-governmental actors, including social media companies and community leaders. That guide will be launched later this year and help equip criminal justice practitioners tackling REMVE threats around the world.

Conclusion

Protecting the United States and our interests against all forms of terrorism, including REMVE, remains a top priority for the U.S. Government and the State Department. The scale and complexity of REMVE threats around the world reflect how the terrorist landscape has evolved to become more - diverse, challenging, and global, as terrorists spread their twisted ideas with unprecedented speed and scope via modern technology. As I said before, the State Department's authorities are focused on the international dimension of this threat, yet this is a problem that involves connections between REMVE actors here at home and abroad. We are committed to leading the global community in recognizing and effectively addressing the transnational dimension of the REMVE threat. We welcome the interest of the Congress in this issue and I wish to thank you again for the opportunity to testify before you today. I look forward to your questions.