



**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
HOMELAND SECURITY AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY**

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Testimony of  
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**EXAMINING THE DOMESTIC TERRORISM THREAT IN THE WAKE OF  
THE ATTACK ON THE U.S. CAPITOL**

United States House of Representatives  
Committee on Homeland Security  
Honorable Bennie G. Thompson, Chairman  
Honorable John Katko, Ranking Member

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Thank you, Chairman Thompson, Ranking Member Katko, and members of the committee. I am Dr. Christopher Rodriguez, and I have served as the Director of the District of Columbia's Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency—or HSEMA—since 2017; the agency hosts Washington, DC's intelligence fusion center, which leads counterterrorism analysis and preparedness for the city. Prior to this role, I was a counterterrorism analyst at the Central Intelligence Agency for more than 10 years. As an appointee of Mayor Muriel Bowser, I am honored to lead an agency that is responsible for Washington, DC's preparedness, coordination, management, and recovery from all hazards—everything from a snowstorm to a hurricane to a global pandemic, including the attack at the US Capitol. Like FEMA, HSEMA sits at the crossroads of the District government's interagency operations, and the HSEMA team works tirelessly to ensure unity of effort before, during, and after emergencies.

I appear today to discuss the January 6 attack leading to the insurrection at the US Capitol, which, based upon my experience, was an act of domestic terrorism. This attack exposed, in the starkest terms, the threat we face from domestic terrorists generally, but also from right-wing extremism specifically. At various times throughout our history, we have witnessed virulent strains of political ideologies running through the American bloodstream. But, time and again, these radical, violent movements have been rooted out or minimized by a combination of medicines unique to the American experience: the central role of democratic institutions, the rule of law, and the unshakeable resolve of men and women of goodwill seeking to build a better nation. What should concern us now, in 2021, is that the current manifestation of these movements is so insidious because while, in the past, they existed on the fringes of society, they are becoming part of the cultural mainstream. These movements are fueled and fed by misinformation and lies that, if not addressed, will only continue to exacerbate underlying social divisions, threatening to tear the delicate fabric of our democratic culture.

The gains our adversaries have made must be stemmed and reversed. As we manage and coordinate public safety agencies to respond to various nefarious acts, the District must reimagine safety and security in the face of the evolving threat of domestic terrorism. There are five elements of our strategy.

- **First, we must regain the narrative.** A byproduct of radical, violent movements entering the mainstream is that they distort real, meaningful debates. “Right-wing extremism” and “left-wing extremism” are not mainstream viewpoints. QAnon, Proud Boys, OathKeepers, Anarchists, and Antifa do not espouse mainstream perspectives, nor should they be treated and validated as such. While the District of Columbia hosts hundreds of First Amendment events per year and respects the rights of all Americans to exercise this constitutional guarantee—even when we disagree with those viewpoints—we will not tolerate violence in our city, and we will call such acts what they are in accordance with the law: crimes or terrorism. In a similar vein, we know that our foreign adversaries—Russia, in particular—are employing a decades-old tool of covert action to fan the flames of cultural conflict here in the US. Our foreign enemies do this by either creating or perpetuating false narratives that strike at the heart of democracy itself: that our elections are rigged; that our system is inherently corrupt and should be overthrown; that radical voices who call for violence or insurrection have legitimate views that should be

heard. In regaining the narrative, we need to call these actions what they are: a direct assault on our system of government and to call those who lend credence to these views as succumbing to foreign influence.

- **Second, we must demonstrate an overt security presence in DC, at least for now.** The District of Columbia, at Mayor Bowser's direction, has requested 500 DC National Guard personnel remain on standby as a Quick Reaction Force through March 12. This posture is essential to ensuring the Metropolitan Police Department can deploy resources to all parts of the city during an emergency. However, we believe we can achieve security in our city, and specifically on Capitol Hill, without making permanent the current razor wire-topped fencing and armed troops surrounding the Capitol. The "people's house" must remain exactly that and not be turned into an armed fortress, closed off from the rest of our city. As the host of our federal government, the District government plays an important role in the Capitol's long-term security posture. Mayor Bowser has already suggested one common sense proposal: the transfer of control of the DC National Guard to the Mayor of the District of Columbia, which would allow for swifter operational decisions during an evolving incident. As we saw on January 6, under federal control, the Guard is not as nimble and responsive as it could be.
- **Third, we must leverage our national intelligence network better.** At its core, the value of intelligence is early warning; it gives policymakers decision-making advantage in a world full of strategic threats. We need to utilize a key tool developed after 9/11 in a more systematic way: the state fusion centers. Funded by the Department of Homeland Security, these intelligence hubs need to do better at sharing information across the network because the domestic terrorist threat is fundamentally one that originates locally and then spreads across state borders. The nearly 80 fusion centers across the nation have more than 2,000 intelligence analysts funded by federal dollars, but their intelligence should be more widely disseminated to those who need it. In DC, we seek to build out our fusion center's analytic capabilities in both the physical and virtual realms, particularly to assist local and federal law enforcement. In the coming months, the fusion center will begin to deploy personnel to key federal agencies, but we need more funding and resources from DHS for this program.
- **Fourth, we must engage communities and workforces better.** A particularly troublesome finding in the early investigations of those who participated in the January 6 insurrection is that a small, but disproportionately impactful, segment of the mob used military tactics to organize and manage the successful advance into and throughout the Capitol. FBI investigations have reported that some of these individuals had US military backgrounds, held "leadership only" planning calls, and participated in military-style training camps prior to traveling to Washington, DC. Recently discovered evidence that some of the attackers were carrying hand ties conjure up foiled plots last year to kidnap the Governors of Michigan and Virginia. All this said, surely people in our communities might know such activities are taking place, either in plain sight, in dark corners of the Internet, or in casual conversation. We need to prioritize insider-threat programs in the US military and law enforcement to ensure these specific skillsets, which are developed to defend a nation, a state, or a community, are not then turned on the very people they are sworn to protect.

- **Finally, we must be prepared for a long fight.** Many of the initiatives discussed here will require new law enforcement and legal tools, such as a domestic terrorism statute. However, the key element of our success will be our—yours and mine—as well as the American people’s, willingness to persist in this fight. The mental and psychological toll of what happened on January 6, as some of you, your staffs, and our police officers can personally attest, can be overwhelming—and tragically, some of our finest have already taken their lives following the insurrection. Our best chance for success is to be straight with the American people—that the threats we now face are arguably as dangerous as they were in the immediate post-9/11 environment, and these threats are not going away. We will be tested; we will be challenged. But in the end, as we have throughout our history, we will prevail—and those who seek to divide us will never be as strong as a people united in a common purpose, for good.

Thank you, and I look forward to answering your questions.