

Summary of the US' "National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism"



NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR COUNTERING DOMESTIC TERRORISM

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NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL



Introduction

In this entry, I summarized Joe Biden's plan to tackle domestic terrorism. If you prefer to read the whole document, you can find it [here](#)^(PDF).

Without any further ado, we shall now proceed with the summary.

Chapter I – Introduction

The introduction begins with a short review of history - the US after the Civil War - and the role of the Ku Klux Klan which *"waged a campaign of terror to intimidate Black voters and their white supporters and deprive them of political power, killing and injuring untold numbers of Americans"*. (Paragraph I, page V)

It moves on and explains that it continued in the decades that followed. Modern examples are also named, such as the killing of a peaceful protester with a vehicle in Charlottesville.

In the second paragraph, the terror attack in 1995 is named as anti-government violent extremism which detonation of a bomb killed 168 people (19 of whom were children).

The most recent example was the attack against Capitol Hill on January 6, 2021 by Trump supporters.

Domestic terrorism is described as a complex and evolving threat that also involves multi-layered set of societal dynamics. While it acknowledges the importance of protection from domestic terrorism, it also emphasizes on protecting the *"cherished civil rights and civil liberties"* (paragraph III, p VI)

Lastly, the strategy is explained as being organized around four pillars, and these are:

1. Efforts to understand and share information regarding the full range of domestic terrorism threats
2. Efforts to prevent domestic terrorists from successfully recruiting, inciting and mobilizing Americans to violence
3. Efforts to deter and disrupt domestic terrorist activity before it yields violence
4. The long-term issues that contribute to domestic terrorism in [the US] must be addressed to ensure that this threat diminishes over generations to come (paragraph II, page VII)

Chapter II - Today's Threats

The second chapter begins with the definition of domestic terrorism, which is:

"activities that involve acts dangerous to human life that are a violation of the criminal laws of the United States or of any State; appear to be intended to intimidate or coerce a civilian population, to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion, or to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping; and occur primarily within the territorial jurisdiction of the United States." (paragraph I, page VIII)

The types of terrorism are categorized as followed:

- **Racially or Ethnically motivated Extremists**

Violent extremists and network *"whose racial, ethnic, or religious hatred leads them towards violence, as well as those whom they encourage to take violent action."* (p. II, p. VIII)

The targets include persons of colour, immigrants, Jews, Muslims, other religious minorities, women and girls, LGBTQI+ individuals, or others.

These ideologies are rooted in the perception that the "white race" is superior.

- **Anarchist Violent Extremists**

This includes extremists that violently oppose all forms of capitalism, corporate globalization, and governing institutions, which they perceive as harmful to society.

Sovereign citizen violent extremists who *"believe they are immune from government authority and laws"* (p. III, p. VIII); or similar individuals and groups that engage in violence against legislative and regulatory actions taken by the government.

- **Single-Issue Extremists**

Under this category fall individuals and groups that focus on one issue and act violently to achieve it. Ideologies related to abortion-, animal rights-, environmental-, or involuntary celibate-violent extremism. Other grievances and a combination of ideological influences are also in this category.

In recent years, the author continues, domestic terrorists acted as lone actors or in small groups consisting of informally aligned individuals who mobilize violence with barely any or no clear organizational structure and direction. Moreover, they ideologies can be *"fluid, evolving and overlapping"* and *"in some instances, connect and intersect with conspiracy theories and other forms of disinformation and misinformation."* (p. II, p. IX)

Internet-based communication platforms - from normal social media to end-to-end encrypted platforms - amplify the threats to public safety.

Since I focus on the chapters, I'm going to include the screenshot of the "Assessment of the Domestic Violent Extremism Threat" unabridged.



ASSESSMENT OF THE DOMESTIC VIOLENT EXTREMISM THREAT

March 2021

The Intelligence Community (IC) assesses that domestic violent extremists (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 Homeland in 2021. Enduring DVE motivations pertaining to biases against minority populations and perceived government overreach will almost certainly continue to drive DVE radicalization and mobilization to violence. Newer sociopolitical developments—such as narratives of fraud in the recent general election, the emboldening impact of the violent breach of the U.S. Capitol, conditions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, and conspiracy theories promoting violence—will almost certainly spur some DVEs to try to engage in violence this year.

The IC assesses that lone offenders or small cells of DVEs adhering to a diverse set of violent extremist ideologies are more likely to carry out violent attacks in the Homeland than organizations that allegedly advocate a DVE ideology. DVE attackers often radicalize independently by consuming violent extremist material online and mobilize without direction from a violent extremist organization, making detection and disruption difficult.

The IC assesses that 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

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personnel and facilities. The IC assesses that the MVE threat increased last year and that it will almost certainly continue to be elevated throughout 2021 because of contentious sociopolitical factors that motivate MVEs to commit violence.

The IC assesses that U.S. 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 and these RMVEs frequently communicate with and seek to influence each other. We assess that a small number of US RMVEs have traveled abroad to network with like-minded individuals.

The IC assesses that 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 inperson actions, and disseminate materials that contribute to radicalization and mobilization to violence.

The IC assesses that several factors could increase the likelihood or lethality of DVE attacks in 2021 and beyond, including escalating support from persons in the United States or abroad, growing perceptions of government overreach related to legal or policy changes and disruptions, and high-profile attacks spurring follow-on attacks and innovations in targeting and attack tactics.

DVE lone offenders will continue to pose significant detection and disruption challenges because of their capacity for independent radicalization to violence, ability to mobilize discretely, and access to firearms.

Chapter III - Our Approach

The Biden-Administration seeks to form a government-wide effort while not infringing upon the prerogatives of law enforcement, such as those that belong to the Department of Justice (DoJ), Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), as well as *"safeguarding critical patient provider relationships like those maintained by the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) providers with Veterans"*. (p. II, p. XII)

However, it doesn't stop at the Federal Government. Part of the strategy is including crucial partners that include states, local, tribal and territorial governments. It stretches even to foreign allies and partners, civil society, the technology sector, academia, and more.

In paragraph III of page XII, it is emphasized that they *"will focus specifically on violence and factors which contribute to it while respecting civil rights, civil liberties, and privacy protections."* The positive benefits of modern communications technologies (e.g. the internet) are also recognized and the aim is to maximize the positive aspects.

On the next page it is stressed that violence and its incitement are neither tolerated nor protected (including incitement to imminent violence and true threats of violence).

The strategy at hand, so is written, focus specifically on *"unlawful violence that poses a threat to public safety, to national security, and to genuine free expression of ideas"* (p. I, p. XIII).

Moreover, it is claimed that domestic terrorism in their law makes no distinction based on political views - left, right or center - and neither should anyone.

The main objective of the Strategy is to prevent, disrupt and deter violence. Therefore, the reduction of the factors contributing to domestic terrorism is included as well.

Public awareness of how *"terrorists deliberately seek overreaction"* (p. I, p. XIV) and cultivation of digital literacy are meant to form resilience.

The Resilience, in turn, serves as a preventive measure to prevent *"domestic terrorists"* from gaining a foothold in the first place.

Chapter IV – Strategic Pillars

The first pillar is divided into three segments; I'll keep the original caption for reference.

Pillar One | Understand and Share Domestic Terrorism-Related Information

Strategic Goal 1.1: Enhance Domestic Terrorism-Related Research

The FBI and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) generate now regularly Analysis of key trends and trajectories with support from the National Counterterrorism Center (NCC) and others as appropriate, then the information is shared widely across the Federal Government. In addition to that, it is necessary to ease the systematic provision of information and data between the Federal Government and state, local, tribal and territorial partners to get a comprehensive understanding of the domestic terrorism threat landscape. Furthermore, the Federal Government enhances its ability to receive and analyze domestic terrorism threat information from the partners mentioned above.

The coordinated distribution of that information is to be improved as well.

In order to avoid bias or improper influence - even just the mere appearance of it, the Federal Government makes appropriate use of analysis performed by entities outside of the government which provide the needed expertise. The DHS is going to introduce a *"new systematic approach of utilizing pertinent external, non-governmental analysis and information that will provide enhanced situational awareness of today's domestic terrorism threat."*

(p. II, p. XVI) Specialized areas and type of analysis are also included, such as gender-motivated violence.

Strategic Goal 1.2: Improve Information Sharing Across All Levels Within, As Well As Outside, the Federal Government

While the Federal Government continues to improve information sharing to ensure that all relevant Federal partners are equipped to take appropriate measures [on domestic terrorist threats] with this knowledge, it is also acknowledged that they abide by the legal and policy limitations in regard to sharing sensitive law enforcement information. Additionally, the Federal Government has to constantly update and advance its efforts to share relevant information externally.

At the unclassified level, the focus has already been increased to provide more information with more details more quickly. A greater insight into evolving threats, as well as situational awareness notifications can be used to inform public safety and in planning efforts in advance of potential violence. The development of new resources is also part of a broader effort to "boost support to state, local, tribal and territorial law enforcement in tackling domestic terrorism." (p. II, p. XVII) among it is the coverage of relevant iconography, symbology and phraseology used by many domestic terrorists.

Strategic Goal 1.3: Illuminate Transnational Aspects of Domestic Terrorism

In this day and age, terrorists and their supporters increasingly connect via internet-based communication platforms and use them to recruit and mobilize violence across international boundaries. The domestic terrorism threat the US faces, in particular racially or ethically motivated violent extremism, has therefore also an international dimension.

Consequently, the Department of State (DoS) in consultation with the Department of Treasury (DoT) works with other components of the Federal Government and foreign allies to adequately assess the threats and - under relevant statutory criteria - designate foreign entities linked to domestic terrorism as Foreign Terrorist Organizations or Specially Designated Global Terrorists.

Moreover, the DoT, in coordination with law enforcement, explores ways to enhance the identification and analysis of financial activity associated with domestic terrorists and their foreign counterparts. Existing provisions of the Bank Secrecy Act are included.

The exchange of information with foreign partners, where it is deemed appropriate, is part of the effort to recognize domestic terrorism threats that is also of international relevance.

Additionally, the use of public diplomacy programs and messaging by the DoS will serve as a preventative measure to raise awareness in the short-term and shift sentiments in the long-term.

Lastly, the transnational context of domestic terrorism allows to bring to bear relevant authorities and tools specifically focused on international terrorism. Should a treat become international, the full range of tools is used such as intelligence collection tools.

Pillar Two | Prevent Domestic Terrorism Recruitment and Mobilization to Violence

The second pillar consists of two segments (i.e. strategic goals).

Strategic Goal 2.1: Strengthen Domestic Terrorism Prevention Resources and Services

Next to investigating and prosecuting those who have violated the law, it is also of importance to prevent individuals from being drawn into the grip of domestic terrorism in the first place. The measurements are as followed:

- Reducing the "supply and demand" of recruitment materials by limiting the widespread availability online and bolstering the resilience to it
- Reduce access to assault weapons and high-capacity magazines
- Enforcing legal prohibitions which keep firearms "out of dangerous hands"

"Such prevention efforts must be pursued while safeguarding civil rights and civil liberties, including privacy protections, and while avoiding discrimination, bias, and stereotyping".
(p. III, p. XIX)

On the next page it is being recognized that past U.S. Governments have had *"mixed records"* regarding prevention efforts. Not going into greater detail, it is summed up by learning from past prevention efforts and how to protect American citizens without infringing upon their rights and freedoms.

The DHS, for instance, includes the funding of programs for media literacy and critical thinking skills to strengthen user resilience to disinformation and misinformation.

On a worldwide level, that is done by the Department of State and United States Agency for International Development.

As mentioned before, communities on a state and tribal level are also included. The *"evidence-based programs"* (as it is called) is strongly funded and meant to be transparent in their use. On a military-level a mechanism is developed with which veterans can report recruitment attempts by *"violent extremist actors"*.

Potential violence is addressed by equipping individuals, families and local communities with the necessary resources to reduce the risks. Simultaneously, public awareness is boosted to get attention to the availability of said resources.

An *"easily accessible and navigable one-stop website to increase the transparency and accessibility of such resources"* (p. III, p. XXI) is in the works.

Strategic Goal 2.2: Address Online Terrorist Recruitment and Mobilization to Violence by Domestic Terrorists

As the title already suggests, an important aspect of the strategy is to address domestic terrorism-related online recruitment and mobilization. This is achieved by providing information to the private sector and other non-governmental entities - as it is already the case - in a wide array of contexts, from cybersecurity to critical infrastructure defense. Information is also provided to assist online platforms in implementing their own initiatives to enforce their own terms of services, in this context prohibiting the use of their platforms for domestic terrorist activities.

While dealing with the *"supply"* is necessary, it won't suffice. Therefore, as it is put in the document, the *"demand"* has to be addressed as well.

Under *"demand"* are very likely potential victims of manipulation and radicalization meant. With that being said, *"innovative ways to foster and cultivate digital literacy and related programs"* (p. III, p. XXII) is therefore a preventative measure. Educational materials and interactive online-resources, such as *"skill-enhancing online games"* are included.

Once again, it is emphasized that all this is done while, simultaneously, *"respecting human rights and freedom of expression."* (p. I, p. XXIII)

Pillar Three | Disrupt and Deter Domestic Terrorism Activity

The third pillar consists of three segments.

Strategic Goal 3.1: Enable Appropriate Enhanced Investigation and Prosecution of Domestic Terrorism Crimes

At the very beginning, it is being cemented that the FBI is going to remain the lead Federal law enforcement agency for investigating all forms of terrorism, including domestic terrorism.

- ❖ The DoJ and FBI receive additional resources
- ❖ The Fiscal Year 2022 Budget includes significant additional resources for the DoJ and FBI to make sure that they have the analysts, investigators and prosecutors needed to thwart domestic terrorism and "do justice when the law has been broken"
- ❖ Flexibility in regard to human resources in law enforcement to address domestic terrorism threats thoroughly and aggressively
- ❖ Plan of the DoJ to strengthen provision of training and other resources to US Attorney's Offices across the country to match the heightened priority
- ❖ The collaboration between the DoJ and FBI continues
- ❖ The DoJ will strengthen and expand the use of the Domestic Terrorism Executive Committee
- ❖ The DoT supports law enforcement on the financial aspect of domestic terrorism

State, local, tribal and territorial law enforcement also receives up-to-date intelligence and analysis to get a picture of current domestic terrorism threats. Existing information-sharing platforms are going to be improved, such as through the development of mobile applications.

Supplementary to increased information sharing, Federal law enforcement is also going to offer enhanced domestic terrorism-related resources and training to state, local, tribal and territorial partners. The FBI, National Counterterrorism Center (NCC) and DHS develop a strategy regarding the iconography, symbology and phraseology of domestic terrorism, and information on how to recognize potential indicators of mobilization to domestic terrorism. For that, the existing Joint Counterterrorism Assessment Team First Responder's Toolbox is also used, as well as the upcoming edition of the Mobilization Indicators booklet.

Already-existing laws are also taken into account and how to make better use of them. From prohibiting certain private "militia" activity to subordination of the military to civil authorities, as well as state statutes that prohibits groups of people from organizing as private military units

without the authorization of the state government and state statutes that criminalize *"certain paramilitary activity"*.

Strategic Goal 3.2: Assess Potential Legislative Reforms

The question arises whether legislative reforms could meaningfully and materially increase the ability to protect Americans from acts of domestic while, at the same time, prevent potential abuse of overreach. New criminal laws should only be sought after careful consideration (usefulness of tackling the complex, multifaceted challenges that is posed by domestic terrorism while protecting civil rights and civil liberties).

It is mentioned that they ensure the examination is driven by facts and informed analysis of the experts.

Strategic Goal 3.3: Ensure That Screening and Vetting Processes Consider the Full Range of Terrorism Threats

It is said that the system *"has been refined and calibrated over time to ensure increased protections of civil rights and civil liberties as well as enhanced accuracy."* (p. II, p. XXVI)

Thresholds are mentioned that must be met by individuals known or suspected to be terrorists, and where appropriate those are being excluded from certain activities.

They ensure that existing watchlisting mechanisms and systems are applied to known terrorists with connections to domestic terrorist threats in an ideologically neutral manner.

Pre-employment background checks and re-investigations for government employees is also part of the strategy. A diverse workforce on all levels of the government is strived for.

"Those who protect and defend this nation should reflect the nation, including its vast spectrum of experiences and viewpoints." (p. III, p. XXVI)

It is also worked on to augment the screening process for those who join the military and Federal law enforcement, as well as considering to change the Standard Form (SF-85, SF-85P, and SF-86) Federal employee background questionnaires. These measures are meant to prevent individuals who pose a domestic terrorism threat from being placed in positions of trust.

Furthermore, the system and mechanisms for identifying anyone who has already been granted a sensitive position of trust is also going to be improved.

The Department of Defense (DoD) reviews and updates its definition of prohibited extremist activities among uniformed military personnel, and it will consider adequate policy recommendations and options to address such activity among civilians employees and contractors.

Lastly, enabling state, local, tribal and territorial partners to enhance their employee screenings programs and prevent violence through developing threat assessments, resources and training for them.

Pillar Four | Confront Long-Term Contributors to Domestic Terrorism

The fourth pillar consists of only one segment.

In the first paragraph, violent white supremacists and anti-government ideologies are identified as being responsible for a substantial portion of today's domestic terrorism. White supremacy is grounded in racial, ethnic, and religious hatred. In this ideology, portions of the American community are dehumanized.

Tackling long-term contributors is therefore a necessity, and civil society is part of it as well. The following points were named:

- Tackling racism in America
- Protecting Americans from gun violence and mass murders
- Ensuring to provide early intervention and appropriate care for those who pose a danger to themselves and others
- Civics education that promotes tolerance and respect for all
- Investing in policies and programs that foster civic engagement and inspire a shared commitment to American democracy

On the next page (XXVIII) it is emphasized that a substantial effort to confront racism must be undertaken to tackle the threat posed by domestic terrorism. *"[...] every component of the government has a role to play in rooting out racism and advancing equity for under-served communities that have far too often been the targets of discrimination and violence."* (p. II, p. XXVIII)

on all levels, it is continued, deserve the American people to be treated without any racial bias or any other biases and in strict adherence to the law by law enforcement.

The Covid-19 financial relief is described as an element that contributed to an equitable economic recovery which *"can counter economic dislocation and even despair felt by Americans."* (p. IV, p. XXVIII) Then there's the talk about continued effort to *"augment and accelerate the essential work of economic recovery and sustainable development."*

While it may look out of place first to talk about the economy, it is said that this measurement demonstrated that the government *"deliver[ing] for all Americans is crucial to restoring confidence in our democracy."* (p. IV, p. XXVIII)

Finally, the efforts mentioned speak to a broader priority:

Enhancing the faith in government and addressing extreme polarization fueled by disinformation and misinformation which *"can tear Americans apart and lead some to violence."*

Chapter V - The Way Ahead

In the last chapter, historic events regarding domestic terrorism are brought up, that today's domestic terrorism won't fade away by ignoring it, and the strategy is mentioned.

Excerpts from each paragraph:

In 1921, victims of the Tulsa massacre bore the terrible brutality of domestic terrorists of their era. In 1995, the victims of the City bombing in Oklahoma suffered the awful inhumanity of domestic terrorists of their time.

These are just two cases of domestic terrorism; more were named as well as the groups who are often targeted by domestic terrorists. (Paragraph I)

In order to adequately address the threats, concerted action, coordinated implementation and careful respect for civil rights and civil liberties is required. (Paragraph II)

The Strategy, as it has been laid out in the document and this summary, is already underway of being implemented. As the threat evolves, the implementation is being continuously evaluated to ensure the response evolves along with it.

"We will also ensure consistent and rigorous oversight and accountability." (p. III, p. XXX)

End

The summary ends here, and I sincerely hope that - despite it being the first time that I summarize such a long document in my 2nd language - it was informative and understandable.

While it is good to know that accountability and the protection of civil rights and civil liberties are mentioned several times, it is - as always - still the job of civil society and non-governmental organizations to keep an eye on the government and observe how they implement it. The boundaries for the Federal government, as well as the levels below, need to clear to ensure that human rights aren't being violated.

And in case you ask yourself why I, as a non-American took the time to summarize it, here's the answer: the US still plays a very important role in global politics. Laws that are implemented in the United States may inspire other countries to do the same or something similar. Therefore, having knowledge about the original script that influenced the decision-making is, at least in my view, of great importance to understand the dynamics and thought process of other governments. Given that it is about domestic terrorism, the scenario is very likely as well.

