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Hearing on "Domestic Terrorism and Violent Extremism: Examining the Threat of
Racially, Ethnically, Religiously, and Politically Motivated Attacks"

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Introduction

Chairman Peters, Ranking Member Portman, and distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for holding today's hearing "Examining the Threat of Racially, Ethnically, Religiously, and Politically Motivated Attacks."

Two years ago this week, we were in the middle of a spate of attacks. They began in Gilroy, CA and then struck El Paso, TX and Dayton, OH. These attacks shook the country into the realization that mass shootings were on the rise and our country was ill-prepared to prevent them. Those events over the course of a weekend instantly answered any lingering questions about whether domestic terrorism was increasing. During my tenure at the Department of Homeland Security, government data and analysis on domestic terrorism was weak; that made it difficult to see strategic trends in near real-time -- information that informs decisionmakers at all levels of government and our partners. The El Paso attack, in particular, reinforced the evolving threat and critical nature of the problem on our hands.

But those few days in 2019 also served to foreshadow the current spike of violence that started last summer and continues this year. There is no one ideology or grievance responsible for all of the violence we have seen: Some attacks are targeted violence, others ideologically-motivated and still others motivated by a political agenda. The threat environment is rapidly evolving.

Several of the panelists have provided excellent data to you on the nature of the present threat - so I will focus most of my comments on what actions the government can and should do. But I do want to briefly highlight my concern around the growth in Accelerationism - which the El Paso attackers' manifesto referenced as well.

Accelerationism[1] is the belief that individual actors should conduct attacks to help accelerate societal collapse. They believe a civil war or a race war is inevitable and should be encouraged, because on the other side of societal collapse is the opportunity for a rebirth into a more utopian and "pure" state. The utopia one seeks is often dependent on the ideology: in the case of a white supremacist, its the establishment of a white nation; in the case of a violent militia, it might be the return to what is perceived to be the founders' intent. Though long associated with the white supremacist movement, it is a concept that cuts across the spectrum of extreme left and right ideologies. And my concern is that we are seeing threads of accelerationism discussed not just within the context of violent extremist movements but in the political mainstream. To be clear - accelerationism is fundamentally anti-democratic. Accelerationists are like violent jihadists in that they do not believe their goals can be achieved through political means, so they resort to violence. This is dangerous. We all have a responsibility to encourage more responsible discourse that allows for disagreement without dehumanizing our opponents and suggesting violence is somehow justified to achieve one's goals.

Looking back, I marvel at how much the attacks 2 years ago previewed what we are now confronting. Thankfully, we have made some progress in developing capabilities to eventually help prevent such attacks - but we have quite a ways to go to mature our capabilities.

That Saturday evening in 2019, hours after the attack, Acting Secretary McAleenan directed me to expedite the Counterterrorism Strategy my team was developing and directed us to conduct a two-week domestic terrorism "sprint" to identify capabilities that could be brought to bear against the problem and to develop our "blue sky" wish list of resources to better go after the problem.

While interagency efforts led by the White House slowed after a few months, DHS was able to complete the Strategic Framework to Counterterrorism and Targeted Violence in a few weeks. When I briefed this committee on the Framework in October 2019, I noted that the third goal held the key to addressing the missing element in our fight against targeted violence and terrorism: Prevention. Because of your support, we were able to increase DHS funding for prevention efforts by over 1,200% in two fiscal years - simply unheard of in federal budgeting.

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[1]https://www.fpri.org/article/2020/04/the-growing-threat-posed-by-accelerationism-and-accelerationist-groups-worldwide/

Prevention - the Missing Piece in Our Preparedness Mission

Since its creation in 2003, DHS has initiated numerous programs and activities to provide support to State, local, tribal and territorial governments and non-profit and private sector partners across the National Preparedness System. The National Preparedness Goal is composed of five Mission Areas: Prevention, Protection, Mitigation, Response, and Recovery. Across four of these missions, DHS has supported our partners in steadily building core capabilities for decades. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)—as the primary lead for the mitigation, response and recovery missions—has worked to hone the doctrine, policy, concept of operations, and training since the 1980s, while the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), which leads the protection mission, has been at it for 15 years.

Until the DHS Strategic Framework was released in 2019, prevention was largely seen as a narrow set of capabilities for disrupting an attack and defeating (or arresting) terrorists. At home, law enforcement was responsible for these capabilities; in the overseas context, intelligence, military, and law enforcement communities contributed.

But several years ago, counterterrorism colleagues in the intelligence and military communities noted that while we had successfully prevented another attack on the scale of 9/11 on our homeland, we have more terrorists worldwide today than we did on September 11, 2001. So we asked ourselves: Are we actually defeating terrorism? How do we get ahead of it? Can we find other tools to help prevent people from radicalizing and moving towards violence in the first place? After all, military and law enforcement means are holding things at bay, but not winning. That realization, combined with law enforcement's concerns that they could not keep up with the increased volume and velocity at which we were seeing people radicalize (in part due to the widespread adoption of social media and the changes that it wrought in radicalization patterns), led us to realize it was time to change our approach. We needed to move "upstream" and address root causes that drive people to radicalize and seek violence in the first place.

In late 2017, DHS asked the RAND Corporation - which serves as DHS' Federally-Funded Research Development Corporation (FFRDC) - to look at what measures had proven effective in terrorism prevention and make recommendations on what changes DHS should make to improve its prevention efforts. The results from that study, P*ractical Terrorism Prevention: Reexamining U.S. National Approaches to Addressing the Threat of*

Ideologically Motivated Violence[2], released in February 2019, directly informed the policy and programs we developed.

Key findings included:

- Prevention works.
- Prevention capabilities should be locally-based and led. The Federal Government's role is to support and enable.
- Prevention is significantly under-resourced.

Goal 3 of the Strategic Framework —simply titled "Prevent terrorism and targeted violence"—calls for DHS to enable local communities to develop societal resistance to radicalization and develop threat assessment and management capabilities to "off- ramp" susceptible individuals before they commit a crime or violent act. Such efforts should involve experts from public health, mental health, education and social services along with law enforcement. The goal of these efforts is to help build resilience in individuals vulnerable to radicalization and, for those who have radicalized, to attempt to help them find healthier ways to address their grievances or problems before they cross a criminal threshold. While law enforcement has an important role to contribute in threat assessment and management, prevention efforts are best led by non-law enforcement personnel.

The paths of terrorists and other violent actors are not linear. Even in the past few months we have seen a variety of ideological drivers, grievance-based violence, and targeted attacks. However, the factors that drive individuals to violence are almost consistently observed by those who know them best. Multiple studies have demonstrated that families, friends, and other bystanders who are concerned for the wellbeing of these individuals are critical to prevention, as they are often the ones who will recognize behavioral changes over time that may be indicative of radicalization and mobilization to violence.

We have too many anecdotes of mass attackers that were reported to law enforcement in advance of their attack, and law enforcement was unable to do anything other than a "knock and talk". In the aftermath of the attack, law enforcement would often validate that the individual showed concerning signs but that there was no legal mechanism for them to act because no crime had been committed. This was true of the El Paso Walmart attacker, the Marjorie Stoneman Douglas school shooter, and, more recently, both the

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[2] https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2647.html

Nashville Christmas bomber and the shooter at the Indianapolis FedEx facility, to name only a few.

Building local prevention frameworks allows bystanders -- the neighbors, colleagues, friends, and loved ones -- that notice something is wrong, to consult with experts when they have concerns, BEFORE an individual has committed a criminal act. This is the lynchpin of prevention efforts.

With this expanded concept of Prevention, we briefed Congress on our proposed approach, wrote a Strategy and an Implementation Plan to support it, and Congress provided good start-up funding. All important steps to build out the Prevention mission. But it will take time for Prevention capabilities to mature to levels of the Response and Protection missions. How long? In places where we've piloted the effort, it took about 3-4 years for the pieces to come together to have a functioning prevention capability. And in those locations where it is functioning, it is not yet at full capacity.

I believe this is at least a decade-long investment in building capability. But it is one which will eventually provide significant returns on investment - reducing costs associated with attacks and law enforcement activities - and more importantly, saving lives and restoring peace of mind to the communities that are too frequently targeted by violence.

Bringing Prevention to Maturity and Scale

I've am very pleased with the Biden Administration's commitment to addressing domestic terrorism. To have conducted not only a review of the entire Government's capabilities, but also to develop a *National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism* in a little over 100 days is nothing short of remarkable. Further, they have demonstrated their commitment by dedicating a portion of the State Homeland Security and Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) grants to domestic terrorism and by embracing the 2019 Strategic Framework with an emphasis on Goal 3 and the prevention efforts that I helped launch two years ago.

That said, I remain concerned that the hardest part is always the implementation. COVID and the Administration transition periods predictably and understandably slowed progress. State and local partners are facing significant budget shortfalls due to the economic impact of COVID - stretching thin teams that will work to develop a prevention capability. And I say this next part with tremendous respect for DHS, but I believe it's important to be honest about where the pitfalls may lie: DHS lacks maturity as an institution. It is one of the largest and one of the youngest organizations in the Federal

Government. Headquarters is severely underfunded for the mission and mandates it has. That combined with its youth, leads to bureaucratic friction that often kills good plans before they launch.

For Prevention to work - we need to rapidly scale over a multiple year period. The infrastructure at DHS deserves your guidance and support to grow this mission and remove the frictions and impediments that might impede its growth.

So I come before you today with the following recommendations:

1. **Authorize the Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships** ("Center" or "CP3"). We've discussed this with Congress over the past two years. Authorizing the Center is but the start to ensuring that the prevention mission is empowered and will remove some (but not all) of the resistance in the bureaucracy by ensuring no further "relitigation" about the Center's purpose and mission.

2. **Find a Permanent Home for Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships**
   First, I urge Congress to confirm the Under Secretary of Strategy, Policy and Plans nominee, Robert Silvers, this week, before your August recess.

   Upon his confirmation, I encourage Mr. Silvers to take a serious look at where the CP3 is best positioned in DHS to accelerate the local prevention mission. For context, we knew the placement of what was then called the Office of Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention (OTVTP) to the Office of Policy was temporary. The plan was to incubate OTVTP in the Office of Policy and then determine the best location for it - possibly as part of discussions with Congress when they take up a DHS Reauthorization Bill.

   Had OTVTP been created five years earlier, it would have been placed in the National Protection and Programs Directorate. In late 2018, Congress transitioned NPPD from a headquarters element to "component" status, and renamed it the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA). While we all agree that establishing a cyber and critical infrastructure protection agency was important, DHS Headquarters has been left without a place to manage programs that have no obvious home agency.

   The Office of Policy does not have the infrastructure to support the size and mission of CP3. And as its name suggests, the policy work is functionally different

from the management of programs. A robust discussion within DHS and with the Oversight Committees in Congress should inform CP3 placement so that it is empowered to fulfill its mission.

3. **Quickly Scale Prevention Resources:**
   The initial funding provided by Congress for the Center and for grants is an excellent start, but the upward trajectory needs to continue for the next decade.

   The 2019 RAND Study includes an entire chapter assessing resourcing needs. They used three different quantitative approaches, and found:
   - "Compared with other Western nations, U.S. spending is at or below the bottom of funding ranges calculated based on levels of threat and well below the low end of ranges based on population.
   - Because the traditional criminal justice approaches to counterterrorism of arrest, prosecution, and incarceration are expensive—and the costs of large numbers of even preliminary investigations add up—even if terrorism prevention only makes it possible to reduce that activity by a modest percentage, the benefits will justify the programming costs.
   - The conclusion is similar when approaching the problem looking at the costs of terrorist attacks. Using the costs associated with nonterrorist homicide as a yardstick, an assessment that terrorism prevention can plausibly prevent a small number of lethal incidents, or even one incident producing multiple casualties, would be sufficient for a level of investment significantly higher than the current level to break even."[3]

   RAND summarized:
   > In light of expenditures in the billions of dollars devoted to the rest of the nation's counterterrorism efforts, increases in terrorism prevention efforts not only would put U.S. efforts in this policy area more in line with other nations, but also appear likely to pay off, even if they make only modest reductions in the burden of counterterrorism investigations on law enforcement or in the numbers of attempted terrorist attacks.[4]

   To borrow Benjamin Franklin's famous phrase: "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

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[3] Ibid. Page 222.
[4] Ibid.

3A. Increase Grants from $20M to $200M over a multi-year period.

While requiring that 7.5%[5] of DHS State Homeland Security Program and Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) grants be spent on domestic terrorism sends an important signal to States and Urban Areas, in the context of current strapped State budgets due to COVID, it is unlikely that this year's grant funds will actually be spent on anything new.

States and Urban Areas plan the spending of their DHS grant funds years in advance. That is consistent with the multi-year Preparedness planning approach FEMA encourages. Informing States and Urban Areas in February of the grant year that they have to spend their money to address domestic terrorism results only in a re-writing of the grant application to explain how the pre-planned expenditure supports combating domestic terrorism.

Anecdotally, I've spoken with several states - the 7.5% domestic violent extremism prioritization is not resulting in any new projects.

That's okay. The signal was still important to send - and over a period of years - as State budgets recover from the economic challenges of the last 18 months and there is time to incorporate prevention into the multi-year planning cycle - eventually we will see the State and UASI grants support prevention and other combatting domestic terrorism related activities.

In the interim though, we need dedicated funding. Which is why we asked, and Congress provided, a renewed Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention grant program. It is currently budgeted at $20M - a good start, but not enough.

We need to scale fast. I recommend scaling the FY22 grants to $100M and increasing by $50M for the two years following to reach $200M.

This funding should be further enhanced when DHS completes and publishes the baseline capabilities – a set of standards – for local prevention frameworks. Developed in partnership with state and local governments and prevention practitioners, the baseline capabilities will ensure funding being used for prevention is going towards building targeted capabilities. This is a best practice

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[5] https://www.dhs.gov/news/2021/02/25/dhs-announces-funding-opportunity-187-billion-preparedness-grants

used for homeland grant funding over the past 20 years and was called for in the Strategic Framework.

At some point, Prevention as a discipline will have the maturity and gravitas to participate in the UASI and State Homeland Security Grant Program planning processes and hold its own at the table competing with Emergency Management and Law Enforcement partners for grant dollars. At that point, the dollars available for a dedicated grant program can decrease and potentially phase out. For now, the focus should be on scaling resources quickly so that our local and state partners can begin building prevention capabilities.

3B. Increase the Number and Pace of Hiring of Prevention Coordinators in the Field.
Of all of the areas I am concerned that could lead to failure, nothing is as high risk as the hiring process. When I departed the DHS in April 2020, the plan had been to have 12 Prevention Coordinators in the field by September 30, 2020. This proved to be difficult for a variety of reasons. This year, the office is only adding another 4 Coordinators to the field. The pace of hiring is not consistent with the funding allocated. I do not believe this is for lack of effort on the Center's part, but rather reflects the difficulty recruiting and onboarding individuals who have the right combination of knowledge and skills needed to serve as a Coordinator in the field. To accelerate this process:
- Congress should consult with the Center to consider authorizing direct hiring authority to ensure the Center is able to hire for a very niche, discrete skill set.
- The incoming Under Secretary for Strategy, Policy, and Plans should request a briefing on the status of hiring actions and hold a weekly check-in with the Under Secretary for Management to ensure no further delays in hiring and onboarding procedures.
- Congress should explicitly authorize and appropriate at least 50 FTE to serve as Prevention Coordinators for FY22.
- The Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships should complete a workforce assessment in FY23 that will help determine the full size of the field force needed. Based on my observations of pilot programs, I would estimate the total pool of Prevention Coordinators should be 100-150 - one for every state, with some larger states having an additional support, and one for every major urban area.

Reducing the Threat Requires Societal-Level Change

The security community faces an extremely challenging moment. The COVID-19 pandemic increased social isolation and other stress factors known to increase radicalization and is likely part of the reason why we're seeing significant spikes is mass attacks and other violence.

The country is polarized, and our discourse routinely dehumanizes people that hold opposing views. We lack a shared understanding and unity of commitment to address the threat. Discussions about domestic terrorism are being manipulated and foreign and domestic disinformation is further feeding the grievance cycle – which could cause more people to radicalize to violence.

I believe we will be fighting domestic terrorism that has its roots or inspiration points in the events from the last year for the next 10-20 years.

The problem is simply too big for the security community to fix. We must call on other parts of our society to reflect on their contributions to our current moment. What can the technology community do better? What can educators do to help? What can political leaders do better? How can the faith community better help their followers who chose a dark path?

Ultimately, repairing what is broken in our country will not happen inside the institutional halls of Washington, DC. Yes, the security community has a role and the Congress should debate what additional tools and resources to give them to carry out those roles. But that alone will not fix the rapidly evolving extremist threat we face.

The challenge ahead requires rediscovering we are Americans before we are a party affiliation or a political philosophy. It requires discipline among citizens, and exercising leadership among elected officials and the media, to not give into the monetized grievance cycle of our media and political system. It requires rebuilding civic society at a local level; choosing respectful civil discourse over cancel-culture click-bait; and rejecting political ideologies that focus on grouping "them" into an "enemy" of the "tribe". Where and how do we start? This sounds almost too simple - but research has borne this repeatedly: We start locally. By remembering how to love our neighbor.

Appendix A:
Framing the Radicalization to Extremism and Mobilization to Violence Process

While the radicalization process is not necessarily linear, I find it helps to use a linear framework to identify the different places individuals might be on the pathway to violence. During my time at DHS, we asked the RAND Corporation to help us identify where to head with our prevention efforts. A graphic they produced (see below) in the resulting study lays out the different stages of radicalization.

As the RAND Study on Practical Terrorism Prevention[6] explains, they used a "basic model to anchor their work," which divides "people involved in radicalization processes into three relevant populations:

- Vulnerable population – i.e., all the people who might radicalize to violence
- Individuals who are radical of thought but may or may not become violent
- Individuals actually involved in attempted attacks (planning or actual carrying out of attacks)."[7]

RAND explained that "each successive population is much smaller than the population preceding it, with only a small percentage of any vulnerable population radicalizing and only a percentage of that population escalating to violence."[8]

Traditional counterterrorism efforts have focused on the third category - criminal activity that requires a law enforcement response to disrupt, investigate and prosecute. The first two categories of individuals concern government and the people because of their potential for moving to violence. Since they have not moved into criminal conduct, the government's activities towards these individuals need to be framed differently than those in the third category.

RAND also noted that, "the model is not specific to any given ideology or population."[9] This latter point is notable. Yes, we need to understand the ideologies of violent white supremacists and anti-government extremists. In part because they may help us understand where the next attack may occur or the method they may use, and it may help law enforcement better detect associations with or activities of a particular extremist

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[6] Jackson, Brian A., Ashley L. Rhoades, Jordan R. Reimer, Natasha Lander, Katherine Costello, and Sina Beaghley, Practical Terrorism Prevention: Reexamining U.S. National Approaches to Addressing the Threat of Ideologically Motivated Violence. Homeland Security Operational Analysis Center operated by the RAND Corporation, 2019. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2647.html. Also available in print form.
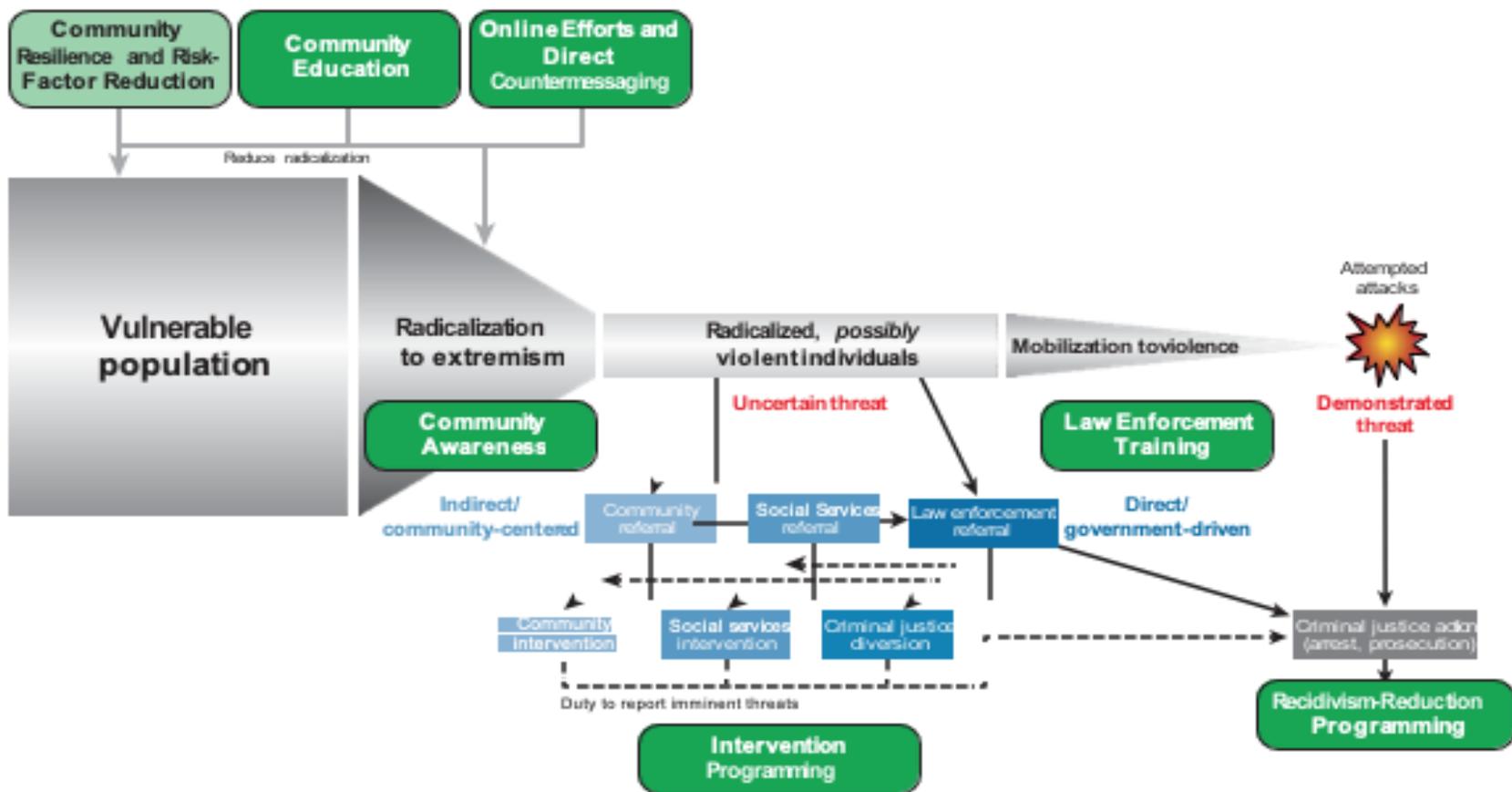[7] Ibid., xix.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.

group. But many extremism experts note that the motivation to join terrorist movements tend to be less about the ideology and more about filling unmet needs caused by trauma, exposure to violence, a sense of marginalization, grievance or humiliation.[10] This means, arguing with a white supremacist about why their ideology is wrong and disgusting, is not an effective de-mobilization or de-radicalization technique.

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[10] This is the assessment of many that research extremism. For example, see:
Miller-Idriss, Cynthia. *Hate in the Homeland: The New Global Far Right* (pp. 3). (2020). Princeton, NJ. Princeton University Press.
Picciolini, Christian. *Breaking Hate: Confronting the New Culture of Extremism* (pp. xxi-xxiii). (2020). New York, NY: Hachette Books.
An interview with Jessica Stern: http://www.bu.edu/articles/2021/jessica-stern-on-why-january-6-attack-on-capitol-was-act-of-terrorism/

Graphic from the RAND Study produced for DHS - *Practical Terrorism Prevention: Reexamining U.S. National Approaches to Addressing the Threat of Ideologically Motivated Violence, Page xx.*

Figure S.1
Radicalization and Terrorism Prevention Framework, with DHS's Terrorism Prevention Lines of Effort

RAND RR2647-S.1