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OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR OF NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE

(U) Domestic Violent Extremism Poses Heightened Threat in 2021

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(U) Executive Summary

(U) The 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 US 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.

(U) 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.

(U) 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 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.

(U) The IC assesses that US 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.

(U) 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 in-person actions, and disseminate materials that contribute to radicalization and mobilization to violence.

(U) 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.

(U) 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.

(U) Scope Note

(U) As part of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) mission to lead and support Intelligence Community (IC) integration and deliver insights, the ODNI has leveraged IC components to provide a comprehensive intelligence assessment on domestic violent extremists (DVEs). This assessment was prepared under the auspices of the DNI—in consultation with the Attorney General and Secretary of Homeland Security—and was drafted by the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and Department of Homeland Security (DHS), with contributions from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA). The FBI and DHS lead the IC's counter DVE missions—and are thus positioned to bring domestic collection to bear in understanding and addressing this issue—while the NCTC supports them. Other IC elements, such as CIA and DIA, contribute their unique accesses or expertise, including on ties that foreign elements have to DVEs. All agencies are mindful of the duty to respect privacy, civil rights, and civil liberties and to act within the authorities granted to them as they seek to put together as complete an intelligence and analytic picture as is possible.

(U) For the purposes of this assessment, the IC defines a DVE as an individual based and operating primarily in the United States without direction or inspiration from a foreign terrorist group or other foreign power and who seeks to further political or social goals wholly or in part through unlawful acts of force or violence. This assessment does not evaluate the actions of individuals engaged solely in activities protected by the First Amendment or other rights secured by the Constitution of the United States.

(U) IC Categories of Domestic Violent Extremists

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(U) Domestic violent extremists are US-based actors who conduct or threaten activities that are dangerous to human life in violation of the criminal laws of the United States or any state; appearing to be intended to intimidate or coerce a civilian population; and influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion, or affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping, as per the definition of domestic terrorism in 18 U.S. Code 2331 (5). Mere advocacy of political or social positions, political activism, use of strong rhetoric, or generalized philosophic embrace of violent tactics may not constitute violent extremism, and may be constitutionally protected. While the majority of DVEs fall into one threat category, some draw upon or are inspired by ideological themes found in other threat categories.



RACIALLY OR ETHNICALLY MOTIVATED VIOLENT EXTREMISTS

DVEs with ideological agendas derived from bias, often related to race or ethnicity, held by the actor against others, including a given population group.



ANIMAL RIGHTS/ ENVIRONMENTAL VIOLENT EXTREMISTS

DVEs seeking to end or mitigate perceived cruelty, harm, or exploitation of animals or perceived exploitation or destruction of natural resources and the environment.



ABORTION-RELATED VIOLENT EXTREMISTS

DVEs with ideological agendas in support of pro-life or pro-choice beliefs.



ANTI-GOVERNMENT/ANTI-AUTHORITY VIOLENT EXTREMISTS

DVEs with ideological agendas derived from anti-government or anti-authority sentiment, including opposition to perceived economic, social, or racial hierarchies; or perceived government overreach, negligence, or illegitimacy.

MILITIA VIOLENT EXTREMISTS:

DVEs who take overt steps to violently resist or facilitate the overthrow of the US Government in support of their belief that the US Government is purposely exceeding its Constitutional authority and is trying to establish a totalitarian regime; oppose many federal and state laws and regulations, particularly those related to firearms ownership.

ANARCHIST VIOLENT EXTREMISTS:

DVEs who oppose all forms of capitalism, corporate globalization, and governing institutions, which are perceived as harmful to society.

SOVEREIGN CITIZEN VIOLENT EXTREMISTS:

DVEs who believe they are immune from government authority and laws.



ALL OTHER DOMESTIC TERRORISM THREATS

DVEs with ideological agendas that are not otherwise defined under one of the other domestic terrorism threat categories, including a combination of personal grievances and beliefs with potential bias related to religion, gender, or sexual orientation.

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