

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

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### Opening Statement Chairman Stephen F. Lynch Hearing on “Confronting Violent White Supremacy (Part III): The Transnational Terrorist Threat” Subcommittee on National Security September 20, 2019

Today we will discuss the urgent need for the United States to treat white supremacist violence as a transnational terrorist threat to national security. As Chairman Raskin detailed in his opening statement, far-right nationalist ideologies are spreading - and reverberating - across the world, and in recent years we have seen white supremacists increasingly resorting to the use of violence to achieve their ideological objectives. And today, for the first time since September 11<sup>th</sup>, more people have been killed in racially-motivated, or right-wing terrorist incidents in the United States than in attacks perpetrated by Islamic extremists.

This brings me to an important distinction that we must make absolutely clear when framing the parameters of today’s hearing: not all right-wing extremists, white supremacists or white nationalists are terrorists. The First Amendment grants Americans the freedom of speech, and the Supreme Court has repeatedly found that political, or ideological speech, requires the highest levels of protection—even if the content of that speech is abhorrent or contrary to American values. However, the point at which violence is used or suggested to advance those political objectives is the threshold at which counterterrorism and law enforcement officials must be empowered to intervene in order to save lives.

This is a difficult task that requires striking a delicate balance, but it is a challenge the U.S. government became intimately familiar with in the aftermath of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks. Many Americans will recall that as the United States exerted overwhelming military and counterterrorism pressure on al Qaeda, and later the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), these terrorist organizations increasingly turned to “homegrown violent extremists” to carry out terrorist attacks without specific direction or financial support from their organizations’ leadership. These homegrown violent extremists often radicalize on the internet - sometimes in virtual chatrooms with other sympathizers - creating an ideological echo-chamber that would ultimately inspire them to carry out acts of terrorism in pursuit of their political objectives.

White supremacists and right-wing terrorists have taken a page from the jihadist playbook. Today’s right-wing extremists are radicalizing on the internet, absorbing hate-filled

propaganda on sites like the Daily Stormer and in digital chatrooms such as 8chan. There, they find common ideological cause with other white supremacists, and are sometimes moved to take violent action. This latest wave of white supremacist terrorism thus closely resembles that of jihadist homegrown violent extremists, as both lack explicit direction or financial support from an umbrella terrorist organization, thereby making it exceedingly challenging for counterterrorism and law enforcement officials to collect intelligence on potential plots, terrorist networks, and attackers.

Nevertheless, in the aftermath of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, the U.S. intelligence community and national security agencies, as well as those of our allies and partners, mobilized to address the global jihadist terrorist threat. In 2004, Congress passed the Intelligence Reform and Terrorist Prevention Act, which created the Office of the Director of National Intelligence to lead the U.S. intelligence community, as well as the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) to analyze and integrate terrorism-related intelligence and to conduct strategic operational planning for U.S. counterterrorism activities. In fall 2014, the United States created a Global Coalition to Counter ISIS, which today includes 81 countries and international organizations, to improve information-sharing and to counter ISIS financing and propaganda. And most recently, in December 2017, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 2396, which requires UN states to develop watchlists or databases of known and suspected terrorists, including foreign fighters.

We need to start treating violent white supremacy with the same urgency as we do violent Islamic extremism and with a whole-of-government approach.

Unfortunately, for too long, U.S. counterterrorism efforts have focused almost exclusively on the jihadist terrorist threat, and I look forward to today's hearing to discuss how best the United States should address the growing threat of white nationalist terrorism.

Thank you, again, Chairman Raskin, for holding this critically important hearing, and I look forward to today's discussion.