



Department of Justice

STATEMENT OF
JILL SANBORN
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
COUNTERTERRORISM DIVISION
FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
AND THE
COMMITTEE ON RULES AND ADMINISTRATION
UNITED STATES SENATE

AT A HEARING ENTITLED
“EXAMINING THE JANUARY 6 ATTACK ON THE U.S. CAPITOL”

PRESENTED
MARCH 3, 2021

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Good afternoon, Chairman Peters, Chairwoman Klobuchar, Ranking Member Portman, Ranking Member Blunt, and Members of the Committees. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the FBI’s role and efforts leading up to and in response to the January 6, 2021 attack on the U.S. Capitol Building. I am pleased to be here representing the dedicated men and women of the FBI’s Counterterrorism Division.

The violence and destruction of property at the U.S. Capitol Building on January 6th showed a blatant and appalling disregard for our institutions of government and the orderly administration of the democratic process. The FBI does not tolerate violent extremists who use the guise of First Amendment-protected activity to engage in violent criminal activity. The destruction of property and violent assaults on law enforcement officers betray the values of our democracy.

On a more personal note, I want to acknowledge the men and women who put their lives on the line to protect Members of Congress and others present inside the U.S. Capitol Complex on January 6th. The men and women of the FBI, and our partners, are working non-stop with federal prosecutors to bring charges against those who participated in the siege of the U.S. Capitol. Those of us in public service, to include Members of Congress and the U.S. Capitol Police, all take the same oath to protect and defend the Constitution. We feel strongly about the horrible events that transpired on the January 6th.

FBI Efforts Leading up to January 6, 2021

It is not possible to examine the January 6th attack on the U.S. Capitol without an understanding of the overall terrorism threat picture leading up to that day. In 2020, the FBI assessed the greatest terrorism threat to the Homeland was from lone actors or small cells who typically radicalize online and look to attack soft targets with easily accessible weapons; we

remain confident in that assessment today. The FBI sees two distinct sets of individuals within this threat: homegrown violent extremists and domestic violent extremists. Both sets of individuals seek to engage in violent, criminal acts, but homegrown violent extremists are inspired by, or associated with, designated foreign terrorist organizations, while domestic violent extremists are motivated by domestic influences, such as long-standing DVE drivers to include racism, anti-Semitism, perceived government or law enforcement overreach, socio-political conditions, and personal grievances.

Throughout 2020, the FBI authored approximately 12 intelligence products for our federal, State, local, Tribal, and territorial law enforcement partners disseminating trends we saw in threat reporting and criminal activity involving domestic violent extremism. Over the last year, we observed activity that led us to assess there was potential for increased violent extremist activity at lawful protests taking place in communities across the United States. As such, in June 2020, we, with our partners at the Department of Homeland Security (“DHS”), issued two separate Joint Intelligence Bulletins highlighting the potential for increased violent extremist activity at such demonstrations and noting that likely targets would include law enforcement and government personnel. More recently, in late August 2020, we published an analytical report informing our partners that domestic violent extremists with partisan political grievances likely posed an increased threat related to the 2020 election. In that product, we noted that domestic violent extremist responses to the election outcome might not occur until after the election and could be based on potential or anticipated policy changes. In December 2020, we participated in a DHS Intelligence In-Depth product, which advised our partners the threat posed by the diverse domestic violent extremist landscape would probably persist due to enduring grievances.

In the weeks and months leading up to Electoral Certification, the FBI collected and shared intelligence; coordinated and communicated among federal, State, and local law enforcement partners; and positioned federal resources for potential deployment. Through these measures, the FBI worked in close coordination with the U.S. Capitol Police, the Metropolitan Police Department of Washington D.C., and other law enforcement partners leading up to the Joint Session of Congress and the planned demonstrations scheduled for January 6, 2021. The FBI and our federal, State, and local partners collected and shared intelligence and relevant public safety-related information in preparation for the various planned events.

FBI’s Response to Events on January 6, 2021

Throughout the course of the day on January 6, 2021, the FBI was in constant communication with federal, State, and local partners, including through the FBI WFO Command Post and the National Crisis Coordination Center (“NC3”) at FBI Headquarters. Prior to the breach of the U.S. Capitol, FBI Special Agents, including bomb technicians, responded to assist the U.S. Capitol Police with securing two nearby locations where potential explosive devices had been found. While the FBI and the U.S. Capitol Police were responding to, and rendering safe, the devices, it became clear that some individuals had breached security barricades and were entering the U.S. Capitol Complex. In response to requests from the U.S. Capitol Police, the FBI immediately deployed additional assistance.

FBI tactical teams partnered with other responding law enforcement agencies to gain control of the area and offer protection to Congressional Members and staff. One of the FBI tactical teams coordinated with the U.S. Capitol Police and the U.S. Secret Service to provide additional protection to a U.S. Secret Service protectee still in the building. FBI Special Agents on Special Weapons and Tactics (“SWAT”) teams were deployed to secure nearby Congressional office buildings. The FBI Hostage Rescue Team deployed, FBI Evidence Response Teams arrived to collect evidence, and other FBI Special Agents provided perimeter security around the U.S. Capitol and the areas where the explosive devices were found.

Beginning on the evening of January 6, the FBI surged substantial resources to help ensure the safety and security of the U.S. Capitol Complex, Members of Congress and their staff, and the public. Since then, the FBI has deployed our full investigative resources and is working closely with our federal, State, local, Tribal, and territorial partners to aggressively pursue those involved in criminal activity during the events of January 6, 2021. FBI Special Agents, Intelligence Analysts, and professional staff have been hard at work gathering evidence, sharing intelligence, and working with federal prosecutors to bring charges against the individuals involved.

We have active tip lines and web resources for members of the public to provide information that will assist in identifying individuals who were involved in the violence and criminal activity. These resources also allow the public to submit any images, videos, or other multimedia files related to possible violations of federal law. The FBI has received more than 200,000 Digital Media Tips and more than 30,000 tips through our National Threat Operations Center, which continues to receive tips from the public and generate actionable leads for our investigators. The FBI has opened hundreds of subject investigations with regards to acts of terrorism, rioting, assault on a federal officer, and property crimes violations.

Conclusion

Looking forward, the FBI assesses there is an elevated threat of violence from domestic violent extremists, and some of these actors have been emboldened in the aftermath of the breach of the U.S. Capitol. We expect racially or ethnically motivated violent extremists, anti-government or anti-authority violent extremists, and other domestic violent extremists citing partisan political grievances will very likely pose the greatest domestic terrorism threats in 2021 and likely into 2022. The FBI urges federal, State, local, Tribal, and territorial government counterterrorism and law enforcement officials and private sector security partners to remain vigilant in light of the persistent threat posed by domestic violent extremists and their unpredictable target selection in order to effectively detect, prevent, preempt, or respond to incidents and terrorist attacks in the United States.

Chairman Peters, Chairwoman Klobuchar, Ranking Member Portman, Ranking Member Blunt, and Members of the Committees, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. As I hope I will make clear to you, the FBI takes very seriously the threat of domestic violent extremism in any place, by any actor, against any individual or group, and we will continue to follow all the leads, identify those responsible, and hold them accountable. Regardless of a case classification or indictment category, we work daily to carry out the FBI mission to protect the American people and uphold the Constitution of the United States. We are grateful for the support that you and these Committees have provided to the FBI, and I look forward to answering any questions you might have.