



One Hundred Sixteenth Congress
Committee on Homeland Security
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

March 24, 2020

Elizabeth Neumann
Assistant Secretary for Threat Prevention and Security Policy
Office of Strategy, Policy, and Plans
Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Assistant Secretary Neumann:

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to upend American life in new and unpredictable ways, we seek an understanding of how DHS is preparing for and mitigating potential homeland security threats from bad actors, such as violent extremists in the United States and abroad, who may seek to exploit vulnerabilities stemming from this metastasizing crisis. To that end, we would like to know how the Office of Threat Prevention and Security Policy is coordinating DHS prevention efforts to account for the evolving threat landscape under the specter of COVID-19.

Recent media reports have highlighted how white supremacist extremists across the world are discussing ways to take advantage of the COVID-19 pandemic to advance violent ends, including, in some cases, accelerating society toward mass violence by sowing chaos.¹ ISIS, too, appears to be interested in exploiting the crisis: in the March 19, 2020, issue of the ISIS magazine *Al-Naba'*, an editorial urged adherents to leverage the pandemic to free prisoners from the “prisons of the polytheists and the camps of humiliation,” arguing that Western countries’ security forces are preoccupied with the crisis and their financial resources are being drained.²

Federal law enforcement entities have published similar warnings. The Federal Protective Service, under DHS, released an intelligence brief, entitled “White Racially Motivated Violent Extremists Suggest Spreading the Coronavirus,” warning that white supremacist extremists have discussed the “obligation” to spread COVID-19 to law enforcement and minority communities.³ The Federal Bureau of Investigation’s

¹ Ben Makuch, *Experts Say Neo-Nazi 'Accelerationists' Discuss Taking Advantage of Coronavirus Crisis*, VICE, Mar. 18, 2020, https://www.vice.com/en_ca/article/pkewgv/experts-say-neo-nazi-accelerationists-discuss-taking-advantage-of-coronavirus-crisis; see also Zack Beauchamp, *Accelerationism: the obscure idea inspiring white supremacist killers around the world*, VOX, Nov. 18, 2019, <https://www.vox.com/the-highlight/2019/11/11/20882005/accelerationism-white-supremacy-christchurch>.

² Editorial in *ISIS Weekly Urges Muslims To Take Advantage Of Coronavirus Epidemic To Free Prisoners From The 'Prisons Of The Polytheists And The Camps Of Humiliation*, MEMRI JIHAD & TERRORISM THREAT MONITOR, Mar. 19, 2020, <https://www.memri.org/jitm/editorial-isis-weekly-urges-muslims-take-advantage-coronavirus-epidemic-free-prisoners-prisons>.

³ (U//FOUO) *White Racially Motivated Violent Extremists Suggest Spreading the Coronavirus*, FEDERAL PROTECTIVE SERVICE, Feb. 17-21, 2020, available at <https://www.yahoo.com/lifestyle/federal-law-enforcement-document-reveals-white-supremacists-discussed-using-coronavirus-as-a-bioweapon-212031308.html>.

field office in New York reportedly released an alert warning local police agencies that white supremacist extremist groups were encouraging members to intentionally spread the virus to police officers and Jews.⁴

Extremists have, of course, long made calls to violence against vulnerable groups. However, as the uncertainty, fears, and anxiety engendered by this pandemic strain our social fabric in many ways, we must renew our efforts to guard against vulnerabilities that bad actors may exploit.

The *Strategic Framework for Countering Terrorism and Targeted Violence* states that DHS will “counter terrorists and violent extremists’ influence online” and “develop prevention frameworks ... to identify and respond to individuals at risk of mobilizing to violence.”⁵ We seek to understand how this framework is being implemented across the Department in light of the reports highlighting extremists’ interest in exploiting the current crisis here and abroad.

To that end, we respectfully request an overview of the Department’s efforts to address and prevent any exploitation of the COVID-19 pandemic by violent extremists, including any efforts with foreign partners. In addition, we ask to receive any products that DHS has disseminated to state, local, tribal, and territorial partners regarding this threat.

We look forward to continuing our partnership with you in tackling these serious issues. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



BENNIE G. THOMPSON
Chairman
Committee on Homeland Security



MAX ROSE
Chairman
Subcommittee on Intelligence & Counterterrorism
Committee on Homeland Security

⁴ Josh Margolin, *White supremacists encouraging their members to spread coronavirus to cops, Jews, FBI says*, ABC NEWS, Mar. 22, 2020, <https://abcnews.go.com/US/white-supremacists-encouraging-members-spread-coronavirus-cops-jews/story?id=69737522>.

⁵ *Strategic Framework for Countering Terrorism and Targeted Violence*, DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY, Sept. 2019, https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/19_0920_plcy_strategic-framework-countering-terrorism-targeted-violence.pdf.