



# NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION THREAT INTELLIGENCE CONSORTIUM

April 26, 2021

## Threat Assessment

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### **(U//FOUO) Presidential Address to the Joint Session of Congress**

#### **(U) Summary**

(U//FOUO) This threat assessment addresses threats to the Joint Session of Congress (JSOC) taking place in Washington, DC on April 28, 2021. This assessment is intended to supplement the Joint Threat Assessment (JTA) lead by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, to which NTIC contributed. NTIC concurs with the JTA that domestic violent extremists (DVEs)<sup>1</sup> pose the most likely threat to the JSOC due to recent incidents of ideologically motivated violence, including at the US Capitol on 6 January and continued rhetoric directed at POTUS, members of Congress, and the US Capitol. This assessment additionally considers other threats to the District or prominent public individuals, including those which may arise from extremists being unable to access the Capitol complex.

#### **(U//FOUO) DVEs Most Likely Threat, but Likely Mitigated by Enhanced Security**

(U//FOUO) Enhanced security measures at the US Capitol, including a National Guard presence which extends into May<sup>i</sup>, are likely to deter all but the most determined attackers. The 59<sup>th</sup> Presidential Inauguration passed without significant arrests or violent incidents, which is likely due in some part to these enhanced measures.

- (U//FOUO) On April 2, 2021 a lone actor, likely motivated by a combination of conspiratorial thinking and suicidal ideation, ran his vehicle into a roadblock on the north side of the US Capitol. The vehicle/knife attack demonstrated the effectiveness of enhanced security in that while the attacker was tragically able to kill an officer, he did not succeed in breaching the security perimeter.

(U//FOUO) Threats against POTUS and members of Congress indicate threat actors continued interest in targeting political figures, regardless of security measures.

- (U) In February 2021, US Capitol Police testified before Congress that they were aware of a bomb threat which targeted the JSOC and members of Congress.<sup>ii</sup>
- (U//FOUO) As of February 2021, open-source reporting on alternative media outlets has included footage of security measures at the Capitol fence perimeter which could facilitate attack planning.<sup>iii</sup>
- (U) In April 2021, US Capitol Police reported that threats to members of Congress had increased 65% in the past year and more than doubled since 2017.<sup>iv</sup>

(U//FOUO) DVEs, especially those who do not accept the legitimacy of the current administration may see the JSOC as the next available flashpoint for action. Intelligence community reporting suggests these actors were emboldened by the 6 January attack on the US Capitol.<sup>v</sup>

<sup>1</sup> (U//FOUO) The FBI and DHS define domestic violent extremists (DVEs) as individuals based and operating primarily within the United States or its territories without direction or inspiration from a foreign terrorist group or other foreign power who seek to further political or social goals, wholly or in part, through unlawful acts of force or violence. The 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.

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(U//FOUO) While recognized DVE groups including Militia Violent Extremists (MVE)s<sup>2</sup> and Racially Motivated Violent Extremists (RMVEs)<sup>3</sup> participated in the attack on the US Capitol, academic research suggests that a majority of those on 6 January had no known ties to extremist groups.<sup>vi</sup> This suggests a potentially large pool of violent opportunists who are willing to travel to the District and to participate in illegal activity.

### (U//FOUO) Foreign Entities May Aspire to Attack the Capitol but Lack the Capability

(U//FOUO) Entities such as foreign terrorist organizations and the Government of Iran (GOI), have expressed interest in attacking the US Capitol, making the JSOC an attractive target. NTIC assesses this threat as realistic but less likely than a DVE attack due to these entities lacking a known operational presence in Washington, DC.

(U) In March 2021, a pro-ISIS media group published a poster depicting a fighter watching with the US Capitol Building in flames, stating “We send you to hell”<sup>vii</sup>



(U//FOUO) The GOI may have increased incentive to target national leadership following US airstrikes on Iranian interests in Syria in late February 2021. The GOI is more likely to respond to US interests abroad, however recent activity suggests the GOI regime, or its sympathizers may see value in threatening the homeland, even if the threat is not credible.

- (U) In January 2021, unidentified actors broadcast a threat to fly an aircraft into the US Capitol to avenge Iranian general Qassem Soleimani through air traffic control frequencies. Authorities did not consider the threat credible but did investigate it as a breach of secure communications, according to open-source reporting.<sup>viii</sup>
- (U//FOUO) In January 2021, unidentified actors left a note outside a Jewish community center in the District praising the memory of General Soleimani.<sup>ix</sup>

### (U//FOUO) Extremists Unable to Access the Capitol May Seek Soft Targets Elsewhere in the District

(U//FOUO) Any extremists who might gather in DC on the night of the JSOC but are unable to access the Capitol complex may seek soft targets elsewhere in the District, which may include District government

<sup>2</sup> (U//FOUO) The FBI and DHS define militia extremists—which fall within the anti-government/anti-authority violent extremist threat category—as individuals who seek, wholly or in part through unlawful acts of force or violence, to advance their ideology, based on their belief that the US government is purposely exceeding its Constitutional authority and is attempting to establish a totalitarian regime. Consequently, these individuals oppose many federal and state laws and regulations, particularly those related to firearms ownership. Militia extremists take overt steps to violently resist or facilitate the overthrow of the US Government.

<sup>3</sup> (U//FOUO) The FBI and DHS defines racially or ethnically motivated violent extremism as the threat that encompasses the potentially unlawful use or threat of force or violence, in furtherance of political and/or social agendas, which are deemed to derive from bias, often related to race or ethnicity, held by the actor against others, including a given population group.

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leadership, media, and religious institutions.

(U//FOUO) NTIC has not confirmed any specific threats or plots but is aware that violent extremists who have threatened the US Capitol and could threaten the JSOC have also threatened DC government officials and engaged in criminal activity in the District. The threat of violence would increase if opposing partisan-motivated groups were to conduct demonstrations in proximity.

- (U) In January 2021, a Colorado man arrested in the District for acts related to the US Capitol attack sent text messages threatening to kill the Mayor of DC.<sup>x</sup>
- (U//FOUO) In January 2021, NTIC processed two suspicious activity reports (SARs) involving threats to the Mayor of DC with a nexus to national political developments.<sup>xi</sup>

(U//FOUO) During the post-election period, there have been multiple threats and criminal incidents targeting media and religious institutions in the District.

- (U//FOUO) Many national and international media outlets have bureaus in DC, in addition to local outlets. An attack on these institutions would garner intense domestic and foreign news coverage.
  - (U//FOUO) In January 2021, an unknown caller left a voicemail for a local radio station stating that “patriots are going to burn down” the station.<sup>xii</sup>
  - (U) During the 6 January attack on the US Capitol, attackers destroyed media equipment, threatened journalists, and left graffiti supporting an extremist podcast entitled “Murder the Media.”<sup>xiii</sup>
- (U) In December 2020, suspected RMVEs burned signs at historically African-American churches after planned events<sup>xiv</sup>

<sup>i</sup> (U) National Public Radio. “*Pentagon Extends National Guard Presence at the Capitol.*” 9 March 2021.

<https://www.npr.org/2021/03/09/975479113/pentagon-extends-national-guard-presence-at-the-capitol>.

<sup>ii</sup> (U) NBC News. “*Capitol Police Chief Warns Extremists ‘Want to Blow Up the Capitol’ When Biden Addresses Congress.*” 25 February 2021.

<https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/congress/capitol-law-enforcement-heads-detail-intelligence-failures-leading-jan-6-n1258829>.

<sup>iii</sup> (U) Breitbart. “*LIVE: One Month Later, National Guard Still Stationed in DC.*” 17 February 2021.

<https://www.facebook.com/Breitbart/videos/892334618232021>

<sup>iv</sup> (U) The Hill. “*Capitol Police Chief: Threats Against Lawmakers Up Nearly 65 Percent Since Last Year.*” 21 April 2021.

<https://thehill.com/homenews/senate/549556-capitol-police-chief-threats-against-lawmakers-up-nearly-65-percent-since>.

<sup>v</sup> (U//FOUO) DHS, FBI, and NCTC. “(U//FOUO) *Domestic Violent Extremists Emboldened in Aftermath of Capitol Breach, Elevated Domestic Terrorism Threat of Violence Likely Amid Political Transitions and Beyond.*” 13 January 2021.

<sup>vi</sup> One academic study based on charging documents suggests that as many as 89% of Capitol attackers had no known affiliations, see: (U) University of Chicago Project on Security and Threats. “*The Face of American Insurrection: Right-Wing Organizations Evolving into a Violent Mass Movement.*” 5 February 2021. [https://d3qi0qp55mx5f5.cloudfront.net/cpost/i/docs/americas\\_insurrectionists\\_online\\_2021\\_02\\_05.pdf?mtime=1612585947](https://d3qi0qp55mx5f5.cloudfront.net/cpost/i/docs/americas_insurrectionists_online_2021_02_05.pdf?mtime=1612585947).

<sup>vii</sup> (U) SITE Intelligence Group. “*With Image Depicting U.S. Capitol Ablaze, Pro-IS Group Makes Simple Threat in 5 Languages.*” 1 March 2021.

<https://ent.siteintelgroup.com/Chatter/with-image-depicting-u-s-capitol-ablaze-pro-is-group-makes-simple-threat-in-5-languages.html>.

<sup>viii</sup> (U) CBS News. “*Chilling Threat Sent to Air Traffic Controllers Vowing Revenge for Killing Iranian General is Under Investigation.*” 6 January 2021.

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/iran-threat-air-traffic-control-general-qassem-soleimani-revenge/>.

<sup>ix</sup> (U//FOUO) TrapWire Report #363-92964

<sup>x</sup> (U) WUSA9. “*Court Docs: Colorado Man Who Traveled to DC After Capitol Riots Threatened to Kill DC Mayor, Nancy Pelosi.*” 13 January 2021.

<https://www.wusa9.com/article/news/national/capitol-riots/man-threatened-to-kill-mayor-bowser-nancy-pelosi/65-6b8d8c06-5414-4074-add9-2a4969a73a1a>.

<sup>xi</sup> (U//FOUO) TrapWire Report #12078-93353 and TrapWire Report #363-93101

<sup>xii</sup> (U//FOUO) TrapWire Report #363-93073

<sup>xiii</sup> (U) Washington Post. “*Journalists Were Attacked, Threatened, and Detained During the Capitol Siege.*” 9 January 2021.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/media/2021/01/09/he-was-documenting-chaotic-scene-when-suddenly-trump-supporters-turned-their-ire-him/>.

<sup>xiv</sup> (U) Washington Post. “*Proud Boys Leader Says He Burned Black Lives Matter Banner Stolen From Church During Demonstrations in D.C.*” 18

December 2020. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/public-safety/enrique-tarrio-proud-boys-black-lives-matter-sign/2020/12/18/c056c05e-415a-11eb-8db8-395dedaa036\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/public-safety/enrique-tarrio-proud-boys-black-lives-matter-sign/2020/12/18/c056c05e-415a-11eb-8db8-395dedaa036_story.html).