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PLENARY SESSION 4:

LOOKING INWARD: ADDRESSING DOMESTIC VIOLENT EXTREMISM

WITH KATHLEEN BELEW AND ELIZABETH NEUMANN

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Plenary Session 4 -

Looking Inward: Addressing Domestic Violent Extremism

MR. CARITHERS: Good morning, everyone. I'm Charles Carithers, Principal with Cornerstone Government Affairs and Professor at Georgetown University. Today, our nation faces a myriad of threats, what former Director of National Intelligence, James Clapper, refers to as the litany of doom. However, with so many of these threats being international in origin and outward facing, we will now look within our borders to our homeland. Our next plenary session examines what many experts consider to be one of the greatest threats to our homeland, domestic violent extremism.

As part of that discussion, we have pulled together an amazing group of individuals to explore this threat of domestic violent extremism. Please welcome Dr. Kathleen Belew, Assistant Professor of History, University of Chicago; Elizabeth Neumann, Chief Strategy Officer, Moonshot; Melissa Smislove, Deputy Undersecretary for Intelligence Enterprise

Readiness; and our Moderator, Jeanne Meserve, SpyTalk Podcast co-host and CTV Security Analyst. Thank you.

(Applause)

MS. MESERVE: So, just yesterday, there was another arrest, right near the DNC in Washington, DC. A guy in a truck, that was decorated with white supremacist symbols, and inside was a bayonet and a machete. Melissa, I have to start with you. Readiness is in your title.

MS. SMISLOVE: Yes.

MS. MESERVE: Here we have the Justice for J6 rally coming up on Saturday. We heard yesterday from Governor Hogan, and also Secretary Mayorkas telling us there's a lot more information sharing, intelligence sharing, there has been coordination. Are we truly ready for whatever they might throw at us on Saturday?

MS. SMISLOVE: Yes. And so, all those things are true. We have been working with the Capitol Police, the FBI, the state and locals. We've designated just today, January -- I mean, September 18, as a Sierra 3 (phonetic) event, which means that the federal government will assess the locals and making

sure that we are in fact in a good place on September 18. The event is scheduled to be in Washington, DC. But there are also discussions about having separate rallies, other places. So, we are all over that with our state and local partners.

MS. MESERVE: At this point, what does the intelligence tell you? How many people are you expecting? Who are they likely to be?

MS. SMISLOVE: Sure. So, we have learned a lot since January 6, and we now know how many people have applied for permits. We are tracking the hotel reservations across the United States, working very closely with our state and local partners. And that network that we have established over the last 20 years to make sure that everyone has the same information. And that is something that we weren't as aggressive about over January 6. We have some assumptions, and instead we have eliminated the assumptions with more phone calls, outreach meetings, all around this particular event and any other event that we begin to see or hear about.

MS. MESERVE: So, how many people are you

expecting in Washington?

MS. SMISLOVE: 700 at present.

MS. MESERVE: 700? Only 700?

MS. SMISLOVE: Correct, right now.

MS. MESERVE: And what about possible flashpoints outside of Washington? Are there particular places?

MS. SMISLOVE: Yes. Yes. There are a few other cities that have also conversations occurring online, permits being requested. And so, those are being tracked.

MS. MESERVE: Can you be specific about what cities they are?

MS. SMISLOVE: I'd have to go look now. I don't remember. I'm sorry.

MS. MESERVE: So, Elizabeth, let me ask you, is this a different mix and a different situation than it was on January 6? We now have more intense anti-vax sentiment, we've had census results, and, of course, Afghanistan. Is this likely to be an even more toxic mix than we have on January 6?

MS. NEUMANN: Well, I hope not. I do think

one of the key distinctive features is that there's not as prominent of voice sending the signal that this is the time and this is the place to show up. That matters. You're talking about 700 people. We were == I don't know what the final estimates were, tens of thousands?

MS. SMISLOVE: Yes, perhaps more than that.

MS. NEUMANN: So, you're dealing with a smaller number, which makes it easier on security forces. And -- but that doesn't change the fact that we still have something Kathleen and I -- we can see Kathleen, by the way.

MS. MESERVE: Yes.

MS. NEUMANN: She's here on the screen.

MS. MESERVE: And she will talk shortly.

MS. NEUMANN: That's something Kathleen and I wrote about after January 6, one of the frightening things about January 6, is you did have domestic violent extremist, people that belong to neo-Nazi groups, all the way to the other side of what I would say an organized group might be, the Proud Boys, which get a lot of attention, but generally speaking, are

more of a street gang. So, they can cause problems. They're not nearly as violent in their attempt as a neo-Nazi would be.

Well, those groups, all of a sudden, we're interacting with people that that were only there for political purposes, right? So, you have this merger of parts of the general population with the extremes here. And we've been seeing this extreme going mainstream phenomenon for the last 10 years that really, in real life, tens of thousands of people were experiencing something together, especially after being pent up for the last year, that has a pretty catalyzing effect. And that piece of the puzzle of the last year, I think, changes the dynamics. So, you could have a situation this Saturday that could be more volatile than perhaps what we might have planned, what we might have thought about January 6. But I am heartened that it's a small number.

MS. MESERVE: So, given what you've said about January 6, and that you have people who were there because of political discontent, connecting with white supremacists and the like, have you seen a growth in

the white supremacist groups in the most extreme groups, as a result of those interactions on January 6?

MS. NEUMANN: It's hard to talk about numbers in terms of groups, unless you have firmer data, that at least during my time in government, our government data is not really great. So, a lot of the data that we get from the academic community, and Kathleen, from a historical perspective, is kind of gives us a scope of where we're dealing with.

I will say, last year when I was asked the question, how many people are we talking about? The estimates were 100,000. There was a study done or it's ongoing, being conducted by the University of Chicago, one of Kathleen's colleagues, that indicated that we have about 21 million people in the country. Think about that number, 21 million, who both believed the election was stolen, and that violence is justified because of it. That is a stunning number. One million of the 21 million either belong to an extremist group or know somebody that is. We really have never faced a threat like that in this country. Now, that does not mean that one million people or 21 million people are

about to go pick up a weapon, go do something about it. But to have that level of volatility, interest, desire, it's so far beyond what our security capability can counter.

MS. MESERVE: Kathleen, you have written about war as a predictor of extremism. We just heard Tom Sanderson talk about how this possibly being -- Afghanistan, specifically being a stimulant to this kind of activity. Give us the historical perspective and what you think the impact of Afghanistan is going to be on what we see not just on Saturday, but well beyond that. Oh, we are not hearing --

MS. BELEW: Well, wait a minute for the traditional --

MS. MESERVE: There we go. Now we can hear you.

MS. BELEW: Thank you for letting me join virtually, and my apologies for the clunkiness of the format, as always. So, I'm a historian and my value to you here today I think is to give some historical context that fills in a lot of these gaps that we encounter in thinking about domestic extremism. As

Elizabeth said, I think that the data often is incomplete. And this is where the historical archive can really fill in some of what we should expect, both in terms of ideological kind of targeting and in terms of relative size and the way that groups operate.

This is the same movement that we have been dealing with since the late 1970s, if not earlier. And as Jeanne said, one of the best historical predictors for white power activity or Klan activity over the course of American history is not poverty or populism, or immigration. It is the aftermath of warfare.

Now, that does not just mean that we're talking about a few veterans who join these groups and have an enormous impact, although that does happen, and we can talk more about the specifics. What that means is that this is an opportunistic groundswell that uses the available window of opportunity within a society to recruit and radicalize. And all of us are more available for violent activity in the aftermath of warfare. That number cuts across age group, gender, whether or not people who have served.

So, what this movement is doing is exploiting

that window of opportunity, in order to sort of misuse the capacity of our society for violence. Now, we are now in this incredibly protracted window of aftermath of warfare, this 20-year War on Terror. I teach undergraduates. They don't remember a time before the War on Terror. They don't remember 9/11. We're in that place now. And Afghanistan, particularly, has enormous symbolic resonance for these groups. They're still talking about the Fall of Saigon. So, it's not a leap to look at the news footage of Kabul and the helicopters taking people out, and to emote very strongly about this. And even a new generation of activists will find that powerful.

And, you know, just as one example, we can think about the Charleston shooter Dylann Roof, who, of course, was not alive during Rhodesia, but wore Rhodesian patches as sort of a reference to how this movement ceased Rhodesia Zimbabwe. And I'm happy to talk about more examples as we go.

MS. MESERVE: Elizabeth, let me talk about the military, if I could. I think it was 2009 when DHS first issued a document saying that there was a risk of

veterans being targets for recruiting by far-right groups. Here we are 62 active or former military individuals were taken into custody after January 6 for their involvement there. Where are we on this? How serious a problem is this?

MS. NEUMANN: So, I learned a lot reading Kathleen's book about this connection between war and the violent, extremist movement we have in our country, predominantly the white supremacist and antigovernment extremist movements. The reality is that if you look back in time, I mean, go all the way back to one of the first domestic mass attacks 1966, the UT tower shooting. Now, the individual, the shooter was -- had other factors going on, medical issues. He was a former Marine now.

So, there is a tie between people with former military experience, and perhaps the lethality that they're able to execute, as well as perhaps just the willingness to get over if somebody is toying with the idea, ideating about an attack. When you have that practical experience of being in combat, it's easier to get over that hurdle. So, I don't know that we fully

understand it, but there is a connection.

CSIS did a study, they've studied terrorist attacks and plots going back to 1994. And they in particular, identified that -- I'm sorry, this is actually going back even further, 1972 to 2015. 37 percent of all attacks and plots have come from somebody with military experience. Now that's higher percentage than the general population.

Now, that does not mean that if you served in the military, you're going to go come in and attack. And I know that this is a very difficult conversation to have. It generates a lot of concerns that we're targeting our military men and women by saying, "Gosh, what happened on January 6, with such a large percentage of people arrested and indicted, are either current or former military and law enforcement." But we need to get past the political talking points and actually recognize there's something there, and how do we help? I'm doing this less as a like we got to stop threat and more about we're not doing something well for our military men and women. How do we help them if we have this history of them going to commit attacks?

Let's get them help before they commit those attacks.

MS. MESERVE: Melissa, I know this is obviously in DODs lane, but DHS must have some thoughts. What's the plan to deal with this?

MS. SMISLOVE: Yes. So, part of the plan is to have the talks with our own employees, you know, and DOD is doing that just as DHS is, and --

MS. MESERVE: What do you mean? That you're also vetting your own employees?

MS. SMISLOVE: We are having conversations with our own employees about different groups that are not consistent with the values of the organization. So, you can start to have conversations about that.

MS. MESERVE: And have you weeded some people out as a result of those conversations?

MS. SMISLOVE: To my knowledge, no, no. But it can become a different part of your vetting of your own employees. With the advent of social media, our allegiance to some of these groups now is out there for employers to take a look at. I do want to say, though, you know, when we look at the successful attacks, and the higher percentage being military, there are so many

different factors to evaluate, you know, as an intelligence person, it may be because they are more successful. And so more of the successful attacks can come from someone who is actually trained, not necessarily that more of them are attempted by members of the ex-military, but it's complicated. It's a complicated conversation, are they recruited, do they have inclination? So, it's just -- it's not as straightforward as we want it to be.

MS. MESERVE: Another group that had a -- to be remarkable number of participants on January 16, is law enforcement --

MS. SMISLOVE: Yes.

MS. MESERVE: -- past and present. I think the number is 15 current or past, law enforcement members were known to have taken part in the demonstrations. So, we've heard a lot about federal, state, local cooperation, to deal with domestic violent extremism. Can law enforcement be a reliable partner when you have people who are sympathetic, when you have people who are members of some of these extremist groups?

MS. SMISLOVE: Emphatically? Yes. They have been amazing partners, and they continue to be amazing partners. There are a few law enforcement employees that are sympathetic, just like there are in federal government or and everywhere else, but it is a minority. And so for the most part, yes, we rely very heavily on our state and local partners to address the domestic terror threat.

MS. MESERVE: Elizabeth, do we really know how many law enforcement officers are sympathetic or members? Or is this hypothesis that it's not a large number?

MS. NEUMANN: I don't think we know. I'd go back to one of the things that is so challenging about this mission space is data. We don't have good data. So, that's part of it. But I also, look, we are in the middle of what some researchers have termed a mass political violence movement. So, it's not just the extremist groups or movements that we were worried about pre-January 6. We now have a post January 6, movement that's much larger. So, you still have to worry about Atomwaffen and neo-Nazi and, and the more

organized militias, while you're also needing to be concerned about what we might see on January -- or on September 18, right?

So, there's this -- there are different types of activities that are happening. And you have to assume we're a fairly divided country. And within any workforce, law enforcement, military, the Federal workforce, you're going to have, you know, those same opinions reflected. So, what do we do about it is, is much more about getting to the actual conversations, not when we label each other, even if certain members of law enforcement or the military, you know, maybe, in my personal opinion, are really too close to a Great Replacement theory or too close to a white supremacist, white nationalist viewpoint that we need to instead, you know, understand where they're coming from, understand those grievances and start having more constructive dialogue on it.

MS. MESERVE: We'll get to there.

MS. NEUMANN: Okay.

MS. MESERVE: Before we do, I want to talk to Kathleen about the dimensions of the problem. Does the

federal government know what it should know about these groups? Do we have the full picture?

MS. BELEW: I would love to think that people in the room that you are in right now have the full picture. I would love to think that as a civilian who's not in this space. But as a historian, I am highly suspicious that we have even the beginning of the picture of what's happening in real time.

And one of the reasons I think that is just the way that we tend to frame these conversations, and this is not anyone's fault. I'm not pointing fingers. But we throw around a lot of these terms and groups, as if they are singular splinters of different activity.

What we need to be doing is thinking about a groundswell. So, you can be a, you know, dutiful consumer of news and read every story about the Proud Boys, and you're still getting only one tiny, tiny, tiny sliver of this problem. We're talking about a movement that unites a whole bunch of people across the country, across gender, across social class, across rural, suburban, and urban space. And that has been modeled on not only taking in activists with divergent

viewpoints, but has also been modeled on immediately changing its terms as soon as we, you know, list this group as one to police.

So, what we have to expect is that this is fluid and changing, and that we have to be paying attention not only to any one segment of this. It's about the circulation of people and ideas and activists from, you know, Oath Keepers, Three Percenters, Proud Boys, neo-Nazism, Klan groups, you know, I'm missing many of them, just rattling them off the base. All of these are part of the same groundswell.

So, what we tend to do, and this is not just the level of law enforcement and security, but even at the level of journalism, we tend to tell stories about an anti-semitic shooting in Pennsylvania at the Tree of Life synagogue about anti-immigrant violence in El Paso about anti-black violence in Charleston, about anti-Islamic violence in Christ Church, when those are all perpetrated by white power gunmen, who share the same ideology, symbols, and often social connections. And when we put these things together into the same story, we can start to see much more about scope and

seriousness of the threat.

Now, let me talk about data and number for a second. Across time, these are groups that keep secret membership lists, that have a lot of reasons to misstate their purposes and misstate their scope and number, and that have used leaderless resistance organizing since the early 1980s. So, one commonly misunderstood tidbit that goes out is that these groups have like co-opted cell style terrorism from Al Qaeda and ISIS, this is backward. These groups pioneered leaderless resistance cell style organizing. And what that did was really change their model of recruitment, because they're not looking for 2,000 people to march down the street. They're looking for six people that are willing to commit to detonating a bomb. And that has been operating at the same time as these more public facing groups.

So, all numbers we need to take with a grain of salt. We need to spend less time on who belongs to Atomwaffen, who belongs to Proud Boys, who belongs to neo-Nazi groups. The sorting and counting is important, and I understand why we do it. But we need

to have in-focus this broader groundswell, because in the archive, what we see is that activists often had multiple memberships, traveled between these groups with quite a bit of regularity, shared slogans, and really didn't care that much about which was which. One person that I write about talked about it, as you know, I'm a Baptist and that guy over there is Church of Christ, but we're all Christians, right? And they've also described it as I'm Army and that guy is Navy, but we're all part of the service.

So, we, on this side, trying to regulate it, need to have less of a measured distinction and more of a measure of scope.

MS. MESERVE: Melissa, let me give you a chance to respond to that.

MS. SMISLOVE: Yes, I just want to clarify something. And that is that your federal government does not track groups. We are not interested in who is a member of what group and that is not our interest. We are interested in members of a group that may be prone to violence, so they are -- they have become extremists based on, or they believe, are justified by

their views. We also are keenly interested in getting better at understanding narratives that inspire others to violence. So, I just want to make that distinction. And while we can say as an organization, we will vet our employees to make sure that they have values that are consistent with ours, values that enable them to properly execute their mission. That is not the same as we are tracking groups. Your federal government does not track groups that are domestic, because we are all allowed to have hateful views if we choose to do so, under the First Amendment.

MS. NEUMANN: Which -- can I just add that the funny thing -- and Melissa has to deal with this a lot, but depending on who you're briefing up on the hill, they would either be relieved by that statement or angry at you for that statement.

MS. SMISLOVE: It's the Constitution.

MS. NEUMANN: Right. That's right. But there is mainly -- and this is where it's really unfortunate that we lost the opportunity for commission coming out of January 6, maybe there's still an opportunity for a -- it's been 20 years since 9/11 and the 9/11

Commission, can we do a retrospective commission look at and take on this issue? But you guys have your hands tied behind your back in the sense in a way that you don't for international terrorism. You can count how many people you had --

MS. SMISLOVE: Yeah.

MS. NEUMANN: -- in Al Qaeda.

MS. SMISLOVE: Unlike national terrorism or North Korea or other traditional intelligence community issues, we now rely on Professor Belew.

MS. NEUMANN: That's right. That's right.

MS. SMISLOVE: We rely on your company, you know, we rely on other experts with that background.

MS. MESERVE: Melissa, are there other tools that you wish you had to deal with this, other authorities that you've not got?

MS. SMISLOVE: There are not. We have sufficient authorities. I think it's the will that would be useful for us. The government, the federal government, the federal intelligence community needs to commit to this topic, and when we do, we do a good job but --

MS. MESERVE: Wait, we're not?

MS. SMISLOVE: -- (cross talk) walk away from.

MS. MESERVE: We're not committed to it?

MS. SMISLOVE: We are right now.

MS. MESERVE: Because we --

MS. SMISLOVE: We are now.

MS. MESERVE: We heard from the secretary --

MS. SMISLOVE: Yes.

MS. MESERVE: -- this is priority number one.

MS. SMISLOVE: We are now, yes.

MS. MESERVE: Elizabeth, have we made the pivot, do you think?

MS. NEUMANN: Not enough. Couple of things. I think what Melissa is getting at is that depending on the moment in time, what the current threat is, depending on the political dynamics, the department and the FBI have been kind of told, you know, you should do this, you shouldn't do this. Well, you cannot build up an analytic set of expertise in a couple of months. So, during my tenure at DHS, I was asking questions like, "Okay, what happened in Charlottesville? What does that mean?"

Now, I didn't know Kathleen at the time. I didn't know that's probably where I needed to go ask the question. I thought I could turn to and this is not a slight at my former colleagues, but I thought I could turn to the intelligence community and INA and get that answer. They did not have the analytic expertise. They didn't have somebody like Kathleen, that had been studying this movement to understand and put into context what Charlottesville was, or what Tree of Life represented, or what does it mean that we just saw Christ Church, right?

The strategic trends is super important from a policymakers perspective. And we don't be -- when you keep changing the priorities and you don't have an analytic core, whose job it is to wake up every day and think about this, and study and read books, and go talk to experts. Of course, they're not going to be equipped to be able to do this work. So, there -- I think, Congress needs to pass a law so that it doesn't flip flop, depending on the political winds of the day and, you know, there should be a dedicated group of people at DHS, I think we should look at NCTC, too, and

see what their authorities, whether they can be slightly expanded so that they can help with that mission.

And anybody that thinks that this is going to be something that the FBI solves, hasn't been watching the FBI for the last 20 years. I mean, they do investigations great. They do not do strategic intelligence. We've been after them to do that for 20 years, and that is just not their sweet spot. So, there's nobody today. If you're the president of the United States, and you say I want an assessment on domestic terrorism, there's nobody that actually has that responsibility, quite the same way that National Counterterrorism Center does for international terrorism. So, there's roles and responsibilities gap in our authorities.

MS. MESERVE: Melissa, do you want to rebut that quickly?

MS. SMISLOVE: Just to clarify, DHS and FBI are authorized and required to study domestic terrorism. My point was more of that. It's a matter of emphasis and priority and we have augmented our

resources. As Secretary Mayorkas mentioned, it is a priority. It would be my view as a lifelong intelligence official that it became more of a consistent priority over time.

MS. MESERVE: So, Melissa, let me ask you this. During the Trump administration, looking retrospectively, there appears to have been a real emphasis on extremism on the left, on the Antifa, and not enough attention to what was happening on the right. Is the reverse potentially happening now? Is there so much attention being paid to right wing extremism that something could be happening on the left that we're missing?

MS. SMISLOVE: So, we actually just look at all extremism across the board. So, I would suggest if you go back and read what the Bureau and DHS wrote over the last five years, you'll see a good balance of what actually was happening. So no, I don't think that's a true narrative. I think that's what maybe the different administration or pundits chose to emphasize, but, no, that doesn't reflect the actual work. And that is that we have consistently emphasized the move

to violence.

MS. MESERVE: Kathleen, talk to me for a moment if you could about social media. Has this absolutely turbocharged this environment?

MS. BELEW: Sure. Let me also just quickly respond to something that Melissa said. I just want to convey I have so much respect for folks like you who are working within the bounds of the Constitution, of course, you know, similarly, people at the Pentagon, who are trying to deal with this in our armed forces, without constraining our troops freedom to assemble, freedom of belief, freedom of worship. All of those things are very tricky needles to thread. But I think it is important to remember as we're talking about this, that the white power movement is interested, in many cases in the violent overthrow of the United States.

So, when we throw around the term white nationalism, with the groups that I study, which is Klan, neo-Nazi, Skinhead and Militia, in '70s and '80s, and '90s, and I think with a lot of carry through to today. They're not talking about the United States and

white nationalism. That's not their nation. They're talking about the Aryan nation. And what they're doing is a fundamental threat to the state. They are not simply overly patriotic. They are not simply, sort of, people who believe that whiteness is part of the United States in an inexorable way.

So, just to clarify, I think that it makes sense to put that in perspective when we're thinking about extremism, because just as you said, the litmus here is extremism.

MS. MESERVE: Right.

MS. BELEW: We're not dealing with a left and right that are equally extremists and attempting to overthrow the nation. We are dealing with, you know, when we're talking about resources towards Antifa, we're talking there about a movement that is quite decentralized, that is responsible for, I think, less than five total casualty counts, that is not interested in the overthrow of the government, that is interested in defensive action in their communities, versus a movement that is decades if not generations long, armed with ammunitions and material and explosives that have

been obtained in large quantities from our military posts and bases, trained in paramilitary camps in skills like nuclear medicine and urban warfare. They're interested in mass casualty attacks, which they've already successfully carried out. And we're talking about quite a high body count. These are not equal sides of the political spectrum, and they should not be treated as such. One of them is fundamentally anti-American, and poses a threat to all civilians in the United States.

Now, thinking about social media here is important, especially when we're talking about what to do about things like September 18 and January 6. When we see these organized activists coming into contact with other sort of, I guess I would say, like viral trends in our politics, January 6, I think it's helpful to think of as being three streams of people.

We have organized white supremacist and white power activists, those are a small number, but they're the people who arguably pose the greatest threat. They are marching together with people who believe in QAnon, which I think is quite new, and works in ways that, at

least on the academic side, I think we do not understand well, yet. It's very new, it's very fast, and the radicalization is very deep. And then we have sort of just the sort of diehard part of the Trump base, who are there for free speech action and do get swept up into organized violence.

Okay, so when we're thinking about the 18th, one of the measures is not just like how many people are going to turn out? One of the measures is, who are the people, and who are they bringing with them? Because there's also a major anti-mask, anti-vax, and sort of groundswell that's organized against President Biden's mandates that are looking for the first Saturday that they can demonstrate. And because of the 9/11 anniversary, the first Saturday is the 18th.

Now, we know that white power activists are interested in opportunistically mobilizing, whatever the prevailing issues are for their own purposes. We saw them do this with the anti-masking stuff earlier, in the spring of 2020. It's reasonable to think that they might do that again.

So, one question is, how big -- you know, how

many people are going to turn out from these groups? And I think it's great that we're tracking that. But the other question is, how are they able to mobilize and sweep people along towards extremism?

MS. MESERVE: And social media is clearly a tool. Melissa, this is something that Moonshot looks at.

MS. SMISLOVE: Yes.

MS. MESERVE: Can you tell us, Elizabeth, what Moonshot theorizes can be done to stop this cascade on social media?

MS. NEUMANN: I appreciate the question. I recently joined Moonshot. And part of the reason I did is because there is just no doubt about the tie between social media and the speed at which people radicalize and the speed at which conspiracy spreads. And Moonshot believes that technology can be used for good as well as to counter some of the online harms that we have out there.

So, some interesting things that they discovered, first of all, from just being able to see in real time what was happening after the pandemic

mitigation measures set in, and, you know, March, April 2020, they saw a 37 percent increase in engagement with white supremacist content online, which was, kind of, you know, a little jarring because you're like, where does that come from? Maybe you would think antigovernment movements, but it was white supremacist content.

By March of 2021, so, a year later, 140 percent increase. This is over 2019 levels here in the United States. We know that white supremacists take advantage of chaotic crisis situations. And that's what we think we were seeing happen. Now think about whether -- I was in government at the time at the beginning of the pandemic, having that knowledge, in real time can be really powerful for government leaders to be able to recognize what is spreading online. But can I get to the -- yes, sorry. I know where you leading.

(Laughter)

MS. NEUMANN: Okay, so --

MS. MESERVE: I want to get to questions, so.

MS. NEUMANN: So, how do we deescalate? And

that's probably the most fascinating thing. Moonshot did some studies about three years ago, and found that white supremacist is more than the general population, like by 30 -- sorry, 48 percent will engage in offers for mental health support. And if you're associated with a strong group association, like a KKK, that number goes up to 115 percent.

So, during the election period, Moonshot ran some tests. They evaluated -- reached out to white supremacist groups or people searching, I should say, people searching for white supremacist content, antigovernment, extremist content, armed group content, and targeted ads with certain types of messaging to test what is most effective. And what they found, as the one of the most engaging messages by 17 percent was anger and grief can be isolating.

So, one of the things that I think we need to move to is approaching what's happening, especially with the fast speed at which it's happening, we have to approach this with empathy and we have to recognize much like what Tom was talking about before what the underlying grievance here is not actually the ideology.

It's something else happening to the individual and approaching that not by countering their ideology. And that's, why would you hate, you know, people that aren't white, and this is -- you're crazy. That's not the way to reach out to people and deescalate or possibly even deradicalize. It's through empathy. It's through understanding the grievance, and hopefully moving them to a one-on-one counseling situation, which Moonshot was able to do. We were able to move. We had 70,000 engagements and moved of that 100 people into real life crisis counseling situation.

MS. MESERVE: Melissa?

MS. SMISLOVE: Yeah, sorry. I just want to quickly clarify something before we go to questions. And that is that to Kathleen's point, I do want to remind everyone in October 2020, DHS did write in the Homeland Threat Assessment that the white supremacist groups do present the most severe threat to the United States. So, we do differentiate the different narratives there.

And then the second point, is that we do believe that protecting the First Amendment actually is

a powerful tool for us and our civil rights, civil liberties, privacy and Intel oversight colleagues, we believe really, actually assist us in evaluating the information. So, I don't want to leave anyone with the assumption that we believe that's any kind of an obstacle. And I mean that sincerely. We actually believe it's powerful.

MS. MESERVE: So, I have a lot more questions, but I know you guys do. So, please raise your hand. I see one right here. Wait for a microphone. Tell me who you are. And if you could keep -- either one of you. What the heck? You guys do get out.

MS. NEUMANN: Tom. I vote Tom, or Julia, okay.

MS. MESERVE: Stand up. Give us your name and keep your question crisp, please.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Sure. Good morning, Tom (inaudible). So, a few phrases have been thrown out today. Extremist groups, these people, groups not consistent with the values of DHS, a comment made about the commingling of the Proud Boys and the Oathkeepers, and drawing a parallel to the base, which is just

factually incorrect. I think many here know that in terms of violent extremism and the extent of the violence.

So, the question that I'd asked here is this incredibly complex comment or this incredibly complex -- pardon me -- moment in time, how do we actually define these terms? What is a group? What is an individual who's a domestic violent extremist? And if we don't have those definitions, how do we target and build policy around it that protects civil rights and civil liberties as we go? Because ultimately, that is the core of what we need to do here. Thank you.

MS. MESERVE: Melissa?

MS. SMISLOVE: Yes, we spend a great deal of time on just that point, on definitions, making sure that we are looking at extremists that are motivated by whatever ideology. Again, we do not track groups. We don't classify groups as one thing or another. We're in fact talking about narratives or beliefs that prompt or inspire violence. And we share those definitions very closely with the FBI.

That did not answer your question. He is not

satisfied. And I'm sorry, because I do want to -- I do want to.

MS. MESERVE: Maybe you guys can hash that out --

MS. SMISLOVE: Okay.

MS. MESERVE: -- after we're off the stage.

MS. SMISLOVE: Happy to talk to you later.

MS. MESERVE: Let's take the second question right there.

MS. AINSLEY: Hi. Thanks. I'm Julia Ainsley with NBC News. Melissa, I was really interested, what you had to say about working with state and local law enforcement leading up to Saturday. And I'm wondering if there are lessons learned from January 6, primarily about the way the federal government was involved or lack thereof in preparing for January 6? What does that reach been like with the Metropolitan Police Department, National Guard, Capitol Police? We saw barriers last time on January 6, where Metropolitan Police could not go past 9th Street, for example. What are you doing? What lessons learned were there overall, just to prepare in general? And then

specifically, what are you doing differently leading up to Saturday?

MS. SMISLOVE: Sure. That's a great question. So, we have spent the last 17 years as a department, making those relationships with state and locals coming up with different frameworks and procedures. What we realized after January 6, is that we gotten a little bit lax in some of the aggressive conversations all of us had. So, since then, we've re reinstituted, you know, the biweekly threat calls, the meetings and talking about every one of these events and having the working group. So, some of it was just a lack of discipline, I think, a complacency maybe even, but the framework was always still there, the information was still out there, but you had to actually, like, seek it out, as opposed to having it brought to you.

So, we have all collectively seen this as a failure on our part, to communicate with each other, and to be absolutely certain that all of us have the same information. So, that recommitment is what you've seen since January 6.

MS. MESERVE: Any questions on this side of

the room? Hands, hands, hands? Here we have one right here. Can you get the mic to her? There we go.

MS. VANESSA NEUMANN: Hi, Vanessa Neumann, Asymmetrica, Venezuelan-American. So, when we Latin Americans watch what happened on January 6, their response was, "Welcome to the outdoor goal play (phonetic), America." Any Latin American knows what this is, right, breakdown in institution. So, my question to you is, what are you going to -- one of the things that hasn't been addressed is the perception that institutions have failed the citizens, which is an any grievance anywhere in the world about CVE.

And the other thing is, I'm a little surprised that America does actually have a history of political violence from the civil war on. Now, we do have a long history of and it's astounding that given the amount of expertise we have on countering violent extremism, that that lens has not been turned on us as a nation. And any -- what are your plans to address the perception or the breakdown of institutions and use that as a broader CVE planning in the United States? Thank you.

MS. MESERVE: Kathleen, I'd like to turn that

one over to you. As mentioned, there's a long History in this country of antigovernment sentiment, racist sentiment. So, how do we deal with this? What in the few seconds we have left, what's your prescription for getting past?

MS. BELEW: Let me also clarify to the first question. I'm talking about the social movement ties between these groups and not trying to equalize sort of the actions of each. And I'm happy to discuss that with you by e-mail, if you'd like later. I'm sorry that I'm not there to grab you in the hallway.

Okay. So, in terms of the history of the way that our nation has dealt with political violence, this is a, you know, a long and complex history. But most historians date in the United States, the sort of moment of profound distrust in our institutions to the 1970s, when we see these measures, really, sort of peaking distrust of government, distrust of churches, people move away from their embrace of many of our social institutions. And not for nothing, that's when the white power movement took root in our country. And that's where we see the beginnings of our failures to

deal with it.

Now, one of the reasons that that movement was able to continue from that moment to the present, is because of the way we've allocated our security priorities and our resources. So, if you look at the COINTELPRO phase of the FBI, that's the counterintelligence program. I'm sure you're all aware of this. That program was interested in infiltrating and disrupting groups on both the left and the right. But by far, the majority of the money, the manpower, and the violent action went into groups on the left, leaving Klan groups largely intact, such that they could move from the civil rights era into the present.

We see something similar along the way, where resources were constrained in the early 1990s, before the Oklahoma City bombing, in part because of public perception of government crackdown on these groups at Waco and Ruby Ridge, Waco, of course, being a multiracial community, and not a white power group per se, but one that was understood within the white power movement as a white power community.

Then we see in the early 2000s, of course,

after 9/11, the majority of resources and attention not just in security spaces, but also in the academy were devoted to understanding militant, militant Islamist terror, and -- to U.S. and the world, questions to transnational action, such that these groups really didn't receive very much attention in the interim.

MS. MESERVE: But Kathleen, if I could just interrupt because we're out of time.

MS. BELEW: Oh, yeah. Fine.

MS. MESERVE: Could you look forward for me? Look forward for me? What do we do about this now?

MS. BELEW: Yes. I mean, the short version, I think, is that I think all of us are crying out for a big conversation about our nation's history. I think this is bipartisan. And I think that Make America Great Again, it's a slogan that has to do with an argument about our history and who we are, and that we're not alone in our history of racial inequality and racial injustice. But we as a nation have not had the big conversations about that history. And I really think that that's part of the work that we have to do.

MS. MESERVE: And we have to leave it there.

Kathleen, Belew, Elizabeth Neumann and Melissa Smislove, thank you all for joining us today for this conversation, and thanks to all of you.

(Applause)

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