

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

WEBINAR

THE GLOBAL RISE OF WHITE SUPREMACIST TERRORISM

Washington, D.C.

Friday, June 10, 2022

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Thank you for joining us. I am Dr. Vanda Felbab-Brown, senior fellow with the Brookings Institution and the director of the Initiative on Nonstate Armed Actors. The Initiative on Nonstate Armed Actors analyses nonstate armed actors, illegal economies, and their connections to state government and global powers around the world.

Its work has explored the role of jihadi groups, Latin American and Asian criminal groups, and paramilitaries from Africa to the Middle East to Latin America. Our work also focuses on the United States and the role, impacts, and effects of groups such as border militias and white supremacists.

I am very glad today to be hosting this webinar on a very grave issue, on the issue of right-wing extremism in the United States. I am glad because the issue is enormously timely with the hearings that are taking place on the January 6 insurrection. But particularly, I am glad because we could not wish for a more informed panel of top-level experts, even though the topic is most serious and exceedingly painful as white supremacy and extremism have come to threaten both top level U.S. institutions and our lives on a daily basis.

Indeed, the white supremacist movement has become a top counterterrorism concern for the United States, as it has in other countries. White supremacists have conducted high profile attacks. They have been compared to jihadi terrorists and they are connected to broader political issues, broader political disputes, and polarizations in the United States, but also connected to other white supremacist and other extremist movements around the world.

And so, the issues that we are going to be exploring today is what is the size of the threat? How has it evolved? What are the capacities and weaknesses of the movement or movements? What kind of consolidation or fragmentation is taking place? And crucially, what policies have been adopted? What has been their effectiveness? And what else can be and needs to be done?

I am absolutely delighted to introduce our panel. And, in particular, my colleague Professor Daniel Byman, who is a senior fellow in the Initiative on Nonstate Armed Actors, as well as the Center for Middle East Policy in Brookings, a research center at Brookings that he has previously headed as director. Dan is a preeminent expert on terrorism, a pioneer in the study of jihadi terrorism, and has done equally groundbreaking work on white supremacy and right-wing terrorism issues. If you have not

yet read his recent book that has just very recently come out, "Spreading Hate: The Global Rise of White Supremacist Terrorism," rush to do so. It is an essential reading for scholars, policy makers, and citizens alike.

Dan is also a professor at Georgetown University Walsh School of Foreign Service and he has served previously as a staff member on the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks in the United States, colloquially known as the 9/11 Commission, and the Joint 9/11 Inquiry Staff of the House and Senate Intelligence Committees.

I am equally delighted that we are also joined on the panel by J.M. Berger. He is yet another most distinguished author of highly critically acclaimed books, including "Extremism," a book that is an academic treatise, groundbreaking treatise on the issue of extremism. And more recently a novel called "Optimal." The novel is another publication I highly recommend, a very gripping and absorbing dystopian story of a world run by algorithms and social media. Mr. Berger is a research fellow with VOX-Pol and a Ph.D. candidate at the Swansea University School of Law, where he studies extremist ideologies focusing on a wide set of issues including propaganda, social media, and other methods of spreading extremist ideology, but also methods of countering them. He is also a member of the advisory board of the RESOLVE Network.

And it is equally thrilling to have Dr. Heidi Beirich on our panel. She is the chief strategy officer and co-founder of the Global Project Against Hate and Extremism. And she is really the person who has been a seminal thinker on the issue of white supremacy, nativism, antisemitism for several decades. She has pioneered and worked way back in the 1990s focusing on European fascism and the emergence of far-right movements. Before cofounding the Global Project Against Hate and Extremism, Heidi led the Southern Poverty Law Center's Intelligence Project, the premier organization tracking hate and anti-government movements in the United States.

Dan, let me first turn to you. Can you please give us your assessment of what is the level of threat that white supremacy, right-wing extremism poses in the United States? And explain to us how it has evolved and emerged.

MR. BYMAN: Thank you, Vanda. And special thanks to Heidi and J.M. for joining me today. Both of you were tremendously influential in my thinking for my book and for my research in

general.

We unfortunately have a very accurate image of white supremacist terrorism in the United States right now if we simply recall the attack that happened last month in Buffalo, New York. This particular attack really unfortunately checked a lot of boxes in terms of what I would consider a very typical white supremacist terrorist attack in the last six or seven years.

So, here you had a man who acted largely alone, published a manifesto that had largely a set of borrowed ideas, not necessarily coherently expressed, but nevertheless something that was part of a broader movement. There was an attempt to engage social media. In this case, successfully by livestreaming the attack. And this was someone who very much tried to play commando. He wore body armor. He was someone who saw himself as a soldier going in to attack the enemy. In this particular case, he, of course, targeted the Black community. But we've seen a larger trend in the last six or seven years of going after an array of enemies.

So, we've seen an attack on a synagogue. We've seen an attack in New Zealand on mosques and Islamic centers. We've seen an attack on a Walmart that was frequented by a large Latino population. And, of course, if we go back 10 years, or a little more, we saw in Norway an attack that was trying to target supposed leftists who were orchestrating all these minorities and evil threats coming in that the white supremacists decried.

And what we're seeing, an idea that's gotten a lot of play lately, is what people have often called the "Great Replacement" and drawing on a set of ideas that emerged technically in France about the white community being replaced by immigrants. And then there is the whole range of variations where it's about birth rates and it's about deliberate intermarriage or the problem with the gay community that is decreasing white birthrates, on and on and on.

But what I'd really stress, although this idea gets a lot of attention, the specifics are actually all variations on old themes that the white race is under attack. And you can find many echoes and variations of this going back really decades or even centuries. And what has changed a bit though is there's more connectivity due to social media. And this is something I'm sure we'll be discussing a lot in the session today.

But you see ideas that are ricocheting really around the world. They're going from

Europe to the United States to New Zealand and they'll show up in numerous different contexts. And social media is also providing a model for action. So, you have an attacker who in Buffalo was trying to be a commander -- a commando -- excuse me. And we saw something similar in New Zealand. We saw something similar in Norway.

Also making this difficult with the ideas is that many of the people who are part of this believe lots of different things. And it's really hard to know where the movement begins or ends. So, there is, of course, a strong idea that white people are under attack, that white people are superior. But there is also anti-government strands that at times are very different from white supremacy but at times they are interwoven where the idea is that the government is being the plot against white people.

There are almost endless conspiracy theories. Some of which overlap with parts of the QAnon movement, but some of which are quite distinct. There is a very strong misogynistic element that overlaps with a violent part of what's called the incel movement. And so, when we're talking about the size of the white supremacist movement, we can define it very narrowly to a kind of shared set of neo-Nazi ideas. Or we can define it very expansively. And unfortunately, the more expansive definition seems to capture a lot of the energy of the movement today.

But having talked about this energy, let me briefly say I think it's important to know that although the movement is very dangerous, as we saw in Buffalo, it's also extremely disorganized. It doesn't really have strong groups either compared to the jihadist threat like ISIS or Al-Qaeda at their peaks, but also compared to white supremacists in the past where they were highly organized. We don't see strong leaders. And in fact, just as social media has undermined traditional political leaders, it's also undermined traditional leaders of many white supremacist movements where anyone with a voice can make his, and it's usually he, but not always, can make their mark on this movement.

Also, the overall skill level of violence tends to be quite low. There aren't training camps. There aren't places where these people are set up comparable to what was occurring in Afghanistan before 9/11 or what was showing up in Syria. And as a result, many of the groups themselves are quite easily penetrated by law enforcement and the FBI. And they have less ability as a result to do sustained violence. It also decreases their political power because they can't organize because they're always lashing out at different targets. They can't develop as much cohesive energy.

Having said all that, though, it makes it much harder to predict or stop this movement. That there's a lot of randomness associated with it because it's not groups making careful decisions. It's individuals making ones for their own reasons frequently that make it difficult.

And let me conclude by saying that my biggest concern with the white supremacist movement is actually not directly about violence, although, of course, that should be a tremendous concern, but really its overlap with politics. We see in the United States, for example, real concern over what is, you know, demographic change. The United States is becoming a non-white nation and that's something that is happening very steadily. There is a strong sense of white grievance that it's a very difficult place to be a white man in particular. And that sentiment is widely believed, despite a lot of evidence to the contrary. But still widely believed.

There is tremendous concern over immigration. And there are, in my view, there should be a legitimate debate about immigration. But there is tremendous bias and hatred associated against immigrants. And I'll mention J.M.'s work in particular. There is a broader ecosystem where a range of right-wing ideas flourish that nurture things like white supremacy. And most of this is nonviolent but it legitimates the violent movement. It makes them think of themselves as heroes. They're the ones willing to act while others sit by. And this overlap does have political influence and is the sort of thing that can shape politics and shape lives of millions or even hundreds of millions of people. Let me stop there and thank you again.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Thank you very much, Dan, for this very important beginning of our conversation and it's great that you mentioned J.M.'s works. J.M., I would like to turn to you have you reflect on precisely this overlap with politics. And I would also phrase this overlap between the ideas in the movement and power. Formal political power certainly in various parts of the world when paramilitary groups, militia groups become connected, that are embraced by politicians and by holders of government offices, their power grows enormously and the ability of law enforcement to counter them becomes much more diminished. One of the many consequences, bad consequences of pursuing counterterrorism objectives by building militias abroad. J.M., can you please talk about this overlap with politics and overlap with power?

MR. BERGER: Yeah. And thank you for having me. I really appreciate being able to

take part in this discussion. I think, you know, many of us were sitting in front of our televisions last night seeing one element of this problem playing out as we looked at the hearings around January 6. And I guess I'll start by -- I want to talk a little bit about sort of the general shape of these movements and their ideologies. And then how those ideologies are playing out in the public sphere and how they are really, you know, I mean, the word encroach probably doesn't do justice to their presence in mainstream politics at this point. They are starting to become a major factor in mainstream politics.

So, as Dan alluded to, there is, you know, in some ways these movements are still very fractured. There is an organizationally, you know, we don't see very large groups that are coalescing around coherent ideological platforms or action plans. What we do see is different and social media has kind of created an environment where this can be a more effective approach than it used to be, which is a just very sort of loose synchronization of activity.

So, in the old days, white supremacists and other extremist groups in the United States talked about this as leaderless resistance. There was this idea that if you didn't have big, centralized organizations that everybody would just kind of get on the same page naturally and start a revolution. And that was a terrible idea that failed to work for many, many years. But in the social media environment, it's becoming more viable. So, you can create a big cloud of right-winging ideological ideas and energy and then tap into that in very kind of informal and unstructured ways. And that's a pretty significant tool that is in the hands of these right-wing movements right now.

And in terms of, you know, the audience that this creates because so many of these online tools and media tools that are available to these groups now can reach so many people at a much lower cost than white supremacist propaganda from the 1990s or even the early 2000s. It would cost you thousands of dollars to be able to reach a couple thousand people and now you can reach millions of people for free.

So, that's when you start to really get into numbers. You get into these sort of how these big numbers start to really affect politics. And, you know, there's a -- a couple years ago, I formulated what I called Berger's rule of radicalization, which is -- and it probably needs to be revised at this point. But Berger's rule of radicalization is that on average, 15 percent of any population are assholes, but only 1 percent are violent assholes. And the problem is that when you can access that 15 percent and

mobilize that 1 percent, or less than 1 percent, when we're talking about millions of people, suddenly you have a very big problem that's very difficult to control.

So, a lot of our attitudes about extremism in this country were formulated in the post-9/11 era and were aligned with the capabilities and the intentions of the jihadist extremists. And the big difference here is that jihadist extremists were never able to access an audience of millions of people in this country. Even the worldwide audience, the worldwide audience of supporters for jihadist activity is arguably comparable to the domestic audience in the United States that supports right-wing or white supremacist ideas in some way when you look at the polling. What you see -- the 15 percent was kind of a glib thing that I made up, but you know, the polling does actually support roughly that, like about 15 percent of Americans are supportive of white nationalist ideas when you phrase it in a certain way. You give them a certain kind of question and they respond to it.

So, in terms of just a sheer numbers game, the threat presented by jihadist extremism is always going to be infinitesimally small compared to the threat presented by white nationalist extremism in this country where you have just a much, much bigger pool of potential adherents. And when that giant mass of people starts to mobilize, then you're really starting to deal with a complicated problem. And in some ways, we've been helped by the lack of leadership. The sort of amorphous nature of this movement.

And what I'll sort of note, I'll conclude on right now and I'm sure we'll talk about this more in the discussion to come, is that while I think it's true that these movements are leaderless and disorganized in many ways, what they have right now that they have never have before in this country -- well, not never before, but not in recent history in this country, is a mainstream figure, Donald Trump, who is willing to elevate these concepts, these arguments, and is careless or careful, arguably, enough with his language that he can mobilize a lot of people under -- who have a lot of different views under the same -- into the same direction of sort of negativism and hate and fear mongering. And so, I think that we, really, you can't underestimate the power of a charismatic leader in this kind of context and that's what we really, you know, are going to be grappling with over the next couple of years.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Heidi, the issue of leadership, or its lack of, has been one element that you have examined in your groundbreaking seminal study of neo-Nazi groups. If you can

please reflect on both how these ideas are tied to current events, tragic events like Buffalo, but also just to follow-up with the themes that J.M. spoke about, how concerned should we be when we have leaders of the conservative front in the United States going to a place like Hungary to celebrate Victor Orban, the authoritarian leader in the country, very much espousing white supremacy, nativist ideologies?

MS. BEIRICH: Thanks. Thank you, Vanda. And I want to thank you all, Dan, especially, for having me here today. It's a pleasure even though it's a very difficult topic. I just want to say that the broad outlines of what Dan and J.M. brought up I agree with. The white supremacist universe is, you know, one of great infighting and difficulties and smaller and less organized in the ways that, for example, Islamic extremist groups have been and so on.

However, it has a purchase on western societies that we don't find with other forms of extremism, which is really what J.M. was alluding to. So, there's an ability to mobilize into politics in a way that you wouldn't find with other types of groups. And there's a history that these organizations are tapping into that's a real one. A history in the United States of white supremacy and white rule that they can advance on.

So, we have a couple problems when it comes to these groups. We have the terrorism problem, which Dan outlined with the case of Buffalo or El Paso. And we should remember that the same ideas that motivated those mass atrocities, namely these variations of the Great Replacement or this idea that white people are being wiped out and replaced, you know, sometimes at the hands of Jews, with people of color, have motivated attacks in New Zealand and different places and against different populations, Muslims, Jews, immigrants, and so on.

That's the sort of terrorism end of this and we should never forget that hate crimes are also tied to that. And all across the western world those kinds of attacks are on the rise. Intelligence agencies in multiple countries have cited this kind of violence as either the number one or near number one threat now. It's in multiple countries. And hate crimes are on the rise in many parts of the world.

But to me the problem really is what Vanda pointed out, which is we have now through the actions of Trump and other far-right populous leaders in other countries, activated these disengaged, disparate movements into politics. And they sort of all agree and, you know, we can thank social media for spreading things, that they face the same kind of threat, which is a threat of demographics,

demographic change that is going to displace them from their place of pride and displace white people. And that as a result of that, they are being activated into politics.

In some cases, as in Hungary, where an entire regime has arisen that has targeted populations like immigrants, the LGBTQ community, women, and literally undone the kinds of civil rights and other liberal protections that were put in place after the fall of communism. So, you know, Hungary is an illiberal democracy that large parts of the American right think is a great place.

The recent event with CPAC, you know, a conservative group in Hungary, there were actually two events in the same way. CPAC was one. CPAC used to be a much more normal, what you would think of Republican outfit, you know, connected to people like, you know, praising people like Reagan, is now connected to people who are literally trying to strip rights in other countries and view somebody like Victor Orban, who spoke of the Great Replacement during the event, as a hero and someone to follow.

There was another event in Hungary that week of social conservatives, a big chunk of Americans were there, that are specifically targeting stripping rights from the LGBTQ community and from women, especially on the front of abortion. It brought big American organizations like Alliance Defending Freedom. This is another aspect of right-wing politics that we don't pay that much attention to but there are levels to this. There's sort of the white supremacists, and as you reach further and further into what we consider mainstream politics, you have more and more rights restricting movements. And they activate the extremists to get where they are.

And really what I think of as the biggest threat that we have today when it comes to these movements, is the possibility of an illiberal society like that evolving here in the United States. The possibility of extremist groups having a huge impact on the elections that are coming up. We have people running for office who are members of groups like the Proud Boys and others. We have many, many people running for office on the conservative side who are using the exact same Great Replacement language that we saw from the Buffalo shooter and from the El Paso shooter.

So, it's this sort of invasion of the political space, which, you know, most political scientists would now place our Republican party in the same column as, for example, the AfD in Germany, right? These are far, far right parties. So, that shift of politics is related to this invasion of these

extremist ideas into the mainstream and the way that Donald Trump activated people into the political system.

So, there are dangers to our political system. Anybody watching the hearings last night saw how bad it could get and it could have been worse. But that hasn't stopped and I'll just say, you know, the DHS just put out a bulletin this past week saying we have to be worried about violence around the election for the kinds of things that I'm talking about.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Thank you, Heidi. Very sobering. But, indeed, echoes frighteningly what we see around the world that the extremist ideologies whether they are jihadi ideologies or they are Buddhist right-wing ideologies, become connected to politics and politicians. The level of threat grows very significantly and ability to act effectively becomes very constrained. Which is the second questions I would like to pose to all of you, perhaps starting with Dan. What policies have been effective? And what policies have been adopted? What policies can be adopted yet? What has been the level of effectiveness?

And perhaps let me add another insertion into the questions that I would like to hear all three of you reflect on. So, one dangerous dimension is the connections between politics, mainstream politics, and these ideologies, which goes two ways. It's not just that extremist actors are cultivating politicians. But the politicians watch the power of extremist actors and embrace them for their own parochial political purposes but with disastrous consequences.

But what of also the connections between law enforcement and extremist groups, like white supremacists. Dan, you spoke about the wide and J.M. wrote about the wide ecosystem that has groups that are both not only focused on white supremacy, but also draw or connect to other strands of U.S. politics, anti-government, county supremacy, notions that an elected sheriff should be the highest level of authority, anti-federal government. What is the level of penetration, infiltration, of those ideas and actors and movements in the law enforcement institutions in the United States?

MR. BYMAN: Thanks, Vanda. Let me begin with a few thoughts on your questions. First of all, and I really can't stress this enough, aggressive police and FBI efforts go a very long way in this area. That if your goal is to disrupt potentially violent behavior or having people look for it, and act upon that information can prove tremendously effective. And if you look a fairly number of plots that have

been exposed in the last several years, the good news is we've seen more aggressive law enforcement efforts on this. Rightly, there was a lot attention, for example, on the plot to kidnap and do a trial of the Governor of Michigan. But despite a lot of scary details, it's also very important to know that the level of penetration of those involved was extremely high. And that is relatively common. So, I would stress both resourcing and acting on that.

And going back to political support, police and the FBI need to know that their political leaders are going to support them. There are going to be a lot of difficult decisions they make. They'll make mistakes. And they need to know that they are not going to be hung out to dry for going after targets that are often embedded in the broader ecosystem we've been talking about.

And we saw this happen at different times in very recent U.S. history where even very basic things like an intelligence assessment that the Department of Homeland Security did that was simply warning that there may be some greater dangers coming ahead became incredibly politicized with people using it at the time to say the Obama administration was targeting conservatives and veterans. You know, things that were completely taking the report out of context but in doing so deliberately. So, I will say FBI and police and with resources and support.

To go to your point, though, the law enforcement has to be screened very carefully. And this is something that is incredibly uneven around the country. Where in some places it's done well, but in most places it's not. And especially for the white supremacist anti-government side. And there are different levels of this, right? So, one, you know, to take extreme cases, you do see individual members who might be part of a hate cellar group.

But to me, much more common are individuals with some kind of open degree of sympathy for parts of this agenda. They might not be mobilized for it. But on the other hand, if there is a, you know, attack on a local Muslim, let's say a mosque is defaced or harassment of the Black community, they're not going to be very sympathetic to it. They're not going to be very aggressive in going after the perpetrators. They're going to be thinking that the victims had it coming.

So, screening of police is tremendously important. And can be done. And, frankly, I would say because every young person leaves a pretty extensive social media record, the ability to examine that is to me, very critical.

A third thing I would say and our discussion has alluded to this, is more global cooperation. One of the great successes has been the -- against the jihadist movement has been cooperation around the world. And I don't think the white supremacist movement is as established in its global connections. But still sharing of information, at times identifying dangerous individuals, can be and must be done more aggressively.

And then social media companies have a lot to do. They need to -- some have already expanded their efforts to go after white supremacists and anti-government types. But this needs to be done more consistently across companies. Something that came out really recently was the, I'll say, extremely bad efforts against non-English -- against people who are not speaking English, where there's almost no monitoring in many countries. And, you know, white supremacists and anti-government extremists, you know, speak many languages, right? This is something that's going to be happening around the world.

And, you know, we all pick on Facebook and the recent revelations show there's a lot of reasons to pick on Facebook. But there are a lot of other companies that are going below the radar screen that have huge problems as well. And I think we need to recognize that this is something that is a big problem across this broader industry where they are, at best, playing catchup, and at worst, way behind.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Thank you, Dan. I am interested, J.M., in your thoughts on the policy actions and recommendations that we just reflect on one element that Dan mentioned, the need for screening police officers. And I fully agree. Of course, it's a big challenge in the United States. It does not have a national police force. It has a federal entity. The Federal Bureau of Investigation is one of several national federal police law enforcement institutions. But at the local and state levels, there are tens of thousands of essentially independent police departments with highly different standards. And in some cases, sheriffs elected. In other cases, the head of the city police being appointed by a politician, by a governor, state governor, or by mayor.

So, widely disparate approaches to leadership structure and lack of united national police force. And so, J.M. or Heidi, if you can perhaps include in your remarks part on how we do standard screening in this kind of law enforcement setting that's very different than, for example, the Department of

Defense, which has unified standards for how someone is recruited and how they screen both during the recruitment process and during his or her service in the department. J.M., your thoughts, please on that and more broadly on police approaches.

MR. BERGER: Sure. So, as far as, you know, any kind of national screening process, I can't imagine one that would be politically viable. I can't imagine one that would survive court challenges. You know, what we can do is work on this from more of a civil society and political standpoint.

So, what I would say is, you know, that I often talk about the distinction, there's a distinction I make between pedestrian racism and ideological racism. So, pedestrian racism is you just don't like people who are different from you who have different skin color. And ideological racism is when you have constructed an elaborate rationale for that and that rationale includes a need to take hostile action against members of the outgroup, which, you know, if you're a white supremacist, then non-white people are your outgroup.

So, in police departments in this country, you know, as Dan rightly noted, there's a lot of local variation. But you can generalize pretty fairly, I think, that there is a tremendous amount of pedestrian racism in police departments in the United States. And there's also a pretty significant amount of ideological racism in police departments in the United States. And the job for extremists is to convert the pedestrian racists into ideological racists. And the job for civil society that is opposed to extremism is to convert the pedestrian racists into whatever lessened amount of racism we can realistically hope to achieve. So, I mean, I would love to say that we'd convert them all into anti-racists but I think that's probably a big job there.

So, what I will say and this is in some ways this is based on sort of, you know, the last time I left my house, which was going on three years ago. But it's also the fact that I was having these conversations three years ago makes me think that they're much worse now is that you can see this battleground between pedestrian racism and ideological racism where ideological racists seek to convert pedestrian racists is over the characterization of movements like Black Lives Matter and Antifa and to equate those movements with, you know, Al-Qaeda and ISIS. And to argue that those movements are inherently extremism. Particularly, Black Lives Matter. We can have an extremely wonky, nerdy debate about Antifa. But, you know, Black Lives Matter is not extremist. There is no reasonable justification for

that.

And yet, when I go and speak to law enforcement audiences, that is invariably something that is asked is like what about Black Lives Matter? What about Antifa? And so, if we're looking for sort of a good intervention point, you know, for our social dialogue and, you know, at least Black Lives Matter is certainly an area you can do that in. And what you're seeing in the mainstream political dialog is just an increasing effort to recast, you know, a movement for equity and justice into an extremist movement just because it talks about race.

And that's, you know, this whole critical race theory strain of stuff, all this stuff is how pedestrian racists convert into ideological racists. And the more that happens, the more trouble we're in. So, I mean, I think, you know, not just in law enforcement, but really around society, that's an area we really need to be contesting.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Thank you, J.M. And thank you, you know, for pointing out the legalities of dealing between the federal government and state levels and municipal levels and the complexity in a system like the U.S. of formulating policy at the national level that can't be mandated, let alone enforced at the subnational level. Of course, the Department of Justice and the Federal Bureau of Investigation have for a long time dealt with unruly police departments. Whether this was matters of very high violence by the police department or corruption. And there are various mechanisms such as putting a police department into receivership if all else has failed up until that point.

On the more positive inducement side, institutions like the Department of Justice can incentivize police departments by providing them grants for training officers in anti-extremism. Training officers in awareness. They can incentivize them with grants and reward them with grants if the police department takes a set of actions that would produce desirable outcomes and policies and attitudes. So, both in the civil society engagement that you, J.M., talk about and at the institutional level, there are intervention points that are possible despite the complexity of not having a national police force in the United States.

Heidi, please, your thoughts on what other policy actions can be taken at any level of intervention, whether this is the federal government setting policies, mandating commissions and investigations, or civil society actors themselves taking actions to reduce a polarization in the country and

in engage in appropriate ways with authorities.

MS. BEIRICH: Let me just add a little bit to the issue of extremism and policing here. I happen to teach a class for the University of Southern California for law enforcement on this topic. You know, it's absolutely the case that with more than 18,000 law enforcement agencies, this is a disaggregated mess to try to get a policy pushed through. That said, there are no First Amendment restrictions, and I don't have time to go into all the details, for a police department having a policy on the books that bans extremists as long as it's well defined and it relates to things like good order, moral character, et cetera. Because this is quite a damaging situation for a law enforcement agency when you have somebody like this.

If you have a white supremacist as a police officer that undermines all the cases, destroys your relationships with the community, I mean, there's a lot of downsides to this. So, for example, the NYPD, the Miami PD, the Austin PD, they all have good policies that can serve as models for other police departments banning this activity. The issue is how do you get the word out. How do you convince agencies to do this, which is a massive civil society and sort of professional organization lift for law enforcement organizations like NOBLE and NICP to make this happen. But I do think that it's an absolute priority.

And, you know, I've been tracking cops with extremist connections for decades and there'd be one or two that would pop up every year. A Klansman here, a neo-Nazi there, an anti-government person. But we know from the leaks of the Oath Keepers' list in recent months, that there are actually hundreds such officers. And, Vanda, you actually mentioned the Constitutional Sheriffs movement, these elected sheriffs who are involved in anti-government activities, which there are also hundreds of. So, it's not as miniscule of a problem as you would hope. And then there's, of course, the issue that J.M. brought about more garden variety type racism and prejudice.

But the extremism part has got to be tackled and it's going to be difficult but it matters if we're going to do something about these problems. I should say that as the Defense Department does something about extremism and improves that, it will actually improve policing because a lot of police officers are veterans who get priority in hiring. So, there's a sort of hand in hand situation here.

On the policy front, just in general, I want to completely endorse what Dan said about the

power of law enforcement to break up these groups, affect these groups. And I sure hope that the increased resources and attention that we put to white supremacy and anti-government movements remains whatever happens in our politics going forward because their problem, the problem of these groups and their violence isn't going anywhere no matter what happens in our politics in general. As demographics shift, that continues to give fodder to these groups to be upset and have grievances and they're going to, you know, fight to the last man standing as we see our populations change in terms of the diversity.

I'd also suggest a couple other things. I am an advocate of having more international white supremacists and other types of extremist groups listed either as foreign terrorist organizations or specially designated terrorist groups by the State Department if they have headquarters outside of the United States. Which is true of some of the big Nazi formations we have like the base's leader supposedly is somewhere in Russia.

The U.S. Government does list the Russian Imperial movement, but there many more that could go on that list and it would give law enforcement much greater tools to go after them in terms of investigating their financial, looking at material support, working with our allies in intelligence on these issues. I mean, there's a whole range of things that could be done that isn't being done now.

And it would have a secondary impact on the social media companies because they tend to be more willing to ban or essentially deplatform groups that are on official government lists. And right now, those lists tend to consist mostly of Islamic extremist groups. And this is a problem even for the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism, which is really responsible for removing terrorist content from the internet because the definitions around white supremacist and far right groups are very different and not agreed to in the way that is true of, you know, jihadi type groups.

And there's just a whole range of other things. There are laws in all 50 states against paramilitary organizations. They could be enforced. You know, the government could use its power to be much more serious about investigating the social media companies just in terms of getting data turned over. We don't have to touch on free speech issues or even change things like Section 230, but we could find out what the heck is going on on these platforms. I think about the Buffalo attack and how much, you know, multiple social media companies are involved in that situation. What was happening in the months

up to the attack? Not what we've learned afterwards.

And just, you know, hate crimes in this country are undercounted by 90 percent. We don't even know the nature of the problem because we're only counting a very small sliver of that. We don't know which groups are most targeted. It makes it impossible to make policy and decide where resources should go. So, that's another sort of failing that we have in the United States that needs to be addressed. And I'll leave it there.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Excellent. Let me start with you in the third round. You know, I'm really struck by the recommendations you made that as long as neo-Nazi, white supremacy, right-wing extremist groups have had orders abroad, they should be pushed to be listed as terrorist groups or specially designated entities. This is a tool that has been used, of course, in the jihadi, counter jihadi space, but it has come with great downsides. And I have been one of the people suggesting that there are enormous problems with the designations. Often they are done both to separate them from politics and also to deprive them of funding.

The problem becomes that they significantly hamstring U.S. policy with no assistance, no material assistance being able to be provided even in the face of deradicalization. So, if someone is a member of a terrorist group that's designated as a terrorist group, giving that person a cup of coffee as part of deradicalization, retraining becomes a violation of material support laws.

So, from Afghanistan, to Pakistan, to Nigeria, to Colombia, and the FARC, we have seen enormous complications for U.S. policy and in fact, for policy of other governments of listing entities and then of not being able to engage in deradicalization activities and not even being able to provide socioeconomic support to populations that are controlled by the groups because any money going to the population then being forcibly extracted by the terrorist group is counted as material support.

So, in the broader U.S. space, there is a lot of thinking and critical understanding now that even if you need to list, we need to come up with mechanisms to the list, to create categories. Heidi, I would like to hear your thoughts on that, but also arrive, though, since we are talking what we have seen abroad, how counter terrorism policies abroad have backfired and in my view, become counterproductive and ineffective. If you can also start us on this more global picture by talking about some of your key observations from places like Brazil that have right-wing militias in places like San Salvador, Rio De

Janeiro have been a critical feature of both the violence as well as politics for a long time. Or I would also love to hear your thoughts on the right-wing groups in India and the rise of very extremist, very violent Hindu fragment actors.

MS. BEIRICH: That's a really interesting point that you make, Vanda, about the material support issue, which when I think about that I think that these are huge failures in the way things are carried out or the way they're designed, right? In other words, you should have a much more narrow application of these rules because deradicalization matters. It matters in white supremacist circles as well. There have to be ways to get people out of these movements and to entice them out and you wouldn't want to have any kind of barrier to that like what you've described here.

And in fact, one thing we haven't talked much about so far is the need for avenues for deradicalization and for resiliency, right? Building up resiliency among populations in general to the ideas of white supremacy. There's a whole lot of people working on these kinds of prevention things whether it's media literacy or other forms of sort of inoculating the society from their ideas. So, I completely understand your point. At the same time, I feel like these movements have escaped getting the tools that could be used to reign them in applied to them regardless. But we should learn from the lessons of the errors you're talking about.

So, let's just talk a little bit about the other point that you bring up about militant movements in other countries and far-right movements that are also sort of perverting politics and leading certain countries into what I would consider very dangerous territory. It's like Hungary but different depending on the countries that you're talking about.

So, what we have, for example, is in India, the rise of Hindu nationalist movements that are specifically targeting the Muslim community, sometimes the Dalit community. We have seen really -- some people describe them as pre-genocidal or genocidal conditions, right? We've had, for example, the New Delhi riots orchestrated off of Facebook by Hindu nationalists that led to the deaths of lots and lots of Muslims. And that kind of violence is continuing.

So, the BJP and its allies in much more hardline groups like the RSS is building its politics off of demonization of the Muslim community. And it's a quite terrifying thing and social media, again, kind of like our white supremacist problems here in the United States, has worked hand in hand.

They, in fact, for quite a while, Facebook's head for India was directly allied with the BJP. And Modi was one of the people with the most followers on Facebook. And so, he's basically given a pass.

And this crisis exists in a different way in the Brazilian case where we have again another far right populous government that is demonizing different populations. In particular, the LBGTQ community, the indigenous community. These are the people Bolsonaro has personally attacked. And leveraging social media to build his base and push those ideas out there. One of the biggest problems we have, which has, I think, directly aided the growth of these kinds of extremist movements is social media's inability to apply its rules to all users, including the politically powerful, of course, whose messages are going to have the most impact on the most lives.

In fact, Facebook has a whitelist for these people. So, I can't post things that Narendra Modi can post or Bolsonaro can post. And that's led, I think, to, you know, significantly deforming politics. And, you know, Dan already mentioned the fact that there's basically no content moderation in languages other than English. The biggest example of that has to be what happened in Myanmar with these Buddhist militias who engaged in genocide against the Rohingya population and orchestrated it off Facebook who at the time, I think, had one native speaker the region.

So, this is the kind of dangers we have and as a result of this unmediated space online, far right movements are growing across the globe. And there's many more examples that we could talk about. And just about every kind of militant group that can get on social media and organize off social media does. It doesn't matter where we're talking about. And for the most part, there's nothing done about it.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Thanks, Heidi. You know, I am also struck by listening to your comments about RSS and what you point out here that RSS, the right wing, very extremist right-wing group in India embracing very extremist right-wing Hindu supremacy is also very LBGTQ. So, even in groups that are as disparate, as are for that matter, many of the Myanmar militias, although at least fortunately in Myanmar we have seen their decline, of course, very other dramatic and distressing things are happening in Myanmar. But so, whether we look sort of the Christian white groups in the West, Hindu groups, the Buddhist groups, there is a coalescing of a set of issues. Anti-minorities, religious or other, anti-human rights. Many of these groups also don't like women rights broadly, abortion and others, and of

anti-LGBTQ.

J.M., your reflections in this last round before I start taking questions from audience, on the lessons that we have learned from the fight against jihadi terrorism. What has worked? What has not worked? What should be brought into policies against white supremacist groups? What shouldn't have? And perhaps what should be changed in our policies toward other extremist groups, not just the white ones?

MR. BERGER: Yeah. So, let me, I'll just start by just for sake of continuity, just continue on the social media thread for a minute and then sort of widen the aperture after that. So, there's in the social media content moderation policy space I have, you know, just as a full disclosure, I have both formally and informally consulted on this issue for different companies. And my experience has led me to a couple of thoughts that I inevitably keep coming back to when we get into these discussions.

So, the first is that the foremost problem with social media policy is that it is ad hoc and it is based on when the headlines get unpleasant for the company and nothing else. So, this is a function of, you know, technology, social Silicon Valley culture to some extent. The fact that these companies, some of these companies, you know, maybe more of them soon, are run by, you know, cult of personality type figures who are bringing idiosyncratic views of the world and technology and what freedom of speech means. And so, you know, that is a big systemic problem that we have to figure out some way to deal with.

And the secondary problem is deference to power in these policies as Heidi alluded to. But even more just to sort of drill down on that a little bit, these companies, the question is do you want to replace the authority of the state with the authority of these companies? And how do these companies exist under the aegis of the state? So, if you are a social media company, then your decision to deplatform the president of the United States is a pretty big one with a whole lot of political dimensions, science dimensions that is just like really hard to take that decision to make that decision.

What we saw in Myanmar was a combination of those factors. The ad hoc nature that, you know, the companies, only Facebook did eventually act in Myanmar, but only after the news coverage got to be so brutal that they had to. But it is also a question of how do these companies sit with the state? And do you want the company to have the ability to supersede the states on issues? Or do

you want the company to stand in opposition to the state? And can the company operate in opposition to a state even if it's a very sort of what seems like a trivial issue like whether the president of the United States can tweet.

So, these are super thorny issues. I do think that the companies are failing to meet the challenge that they have in this space. But I also understand that like, you know, there's like a whole can of worms that we're opening up after once the companies do start becoming activists if they start becoming activists in this space, then there's a whole other can of worms we're going to have to deal with. So, it's a big mess and, you know, and I am pretty, overall, I have a pretty dim view of how most of the companies are handling these issues. But I do understand some of the challenges and complexity of it.

As far as sort of getting into the terrorism list and these broader kinds of questions. What I would say is I think, you know, there is very little, when you look at the output of the war on terror, there's very little reason to think that we want to replicate that model or even perpetuate the model as it currently exists in extremist spaces.

So, and it goes, you know, to some extent there was a great Washington Institute panel yesterday and my friend Aaron Zelin was valiantly trying to sort of talk about the issue that you raised, Vanda, about, you know, delisting and, you know, when do we deal with these groups? When do we, you know, acknowledge that these groups have become less radical or, you know.

And probably the original sin of the counter terrorism industry in the post-9/11 era is the reduction of all jihadist movements to a single conglomerated idea. And that is something that has failed us both strategically and policy levels because, you know, our policy in academic and apparatus, intelligence apparatuses were extremely slow to pick up on things like ISIS breaking away from Al-Qaeda and for a long time after ISIS was clearly separated from Al-Qaeda you had people, prominent people in our field, arguing that it's all one thing we have all this -- we just need this one tool. We need this big list of jihadist movements that includes everything from, you know, Ansar al-Sharia and the, you know, a branch in a tiny town in Tunisia to, you know, ISIS in Raqqa, and they all, we have like a one size fits all policy approach to dealing with those things.

So, I think the question is, you know, first, how can we sort of look at the various ways that our efforts have failed in this space, which includes very much counter radicalization, countering

violent extremism, and deradicalization were abject failures in that space. Only in the last couple of years. I will qualify that. In the last few years, there have been -- we have made progress on this stuff. But it's still very difficult to do and secondarily, what we need to acknowledge is that all of these counter terrorism and national security establishment and policies are based on a majority culture imposing these measures on a minority culture.

So, you know, that is the ugly truth of this is that there is no way that the American government will mobilize against white supremacists in the same way that it mobilized against jihadist extremists because white supremacists are white. And the U.S. government will not go there. So, with no political appetite, the public will not support it and what we have to do is if we're going to take a lesson from that, the lesson should be that we treat extremists out of minority populations in the same way. We give them the same deference we're willing to extend to white extremists and not that we should take the measures we used against minority extremists and extend them to everyone, I guess.

I think that, you know, that we've really encountered the limits of state power to change societies and that, you know, that we should be working on this. We need to be devoting resources to it and energy to it. But we need to be using different tools of persuasion and understanding and education. And we need, ultimately, I think, to address one of the root causes of extremism, which is uncertainty. So, when we have a world situation or a domestic situation that is fraught with all kinds of dramatic change and uncertainty, such as under a pandemic, we need to address that uncertainty because uncertainty is what makes people vulnerable to extremist attitudes.

And I've been going on for a while, so I'll stop there but we can certainly address that more in the Q&A if it seems relevant.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Thank you. And, of course, the tool that radical movements of all different types of ideology feed to their followers is promising them certainty even if that certainty is blatantly false and not grounded in reality. The medicine, the fake medicine is promise of certainty.

Dan, last question to you and then I go to questions from the audience. And that question is Russia's invasion of Ukraine, what does this mean for white supremacy, right-wing groups, whether it's from the thickening of relations between state actors and white supremacy groups like Russia potentially using such groups for hybrid warfare, for polarization abroad, whether it is diverting attention of

policy actors. What does it mean for the movement of foreign fighters into Ukraine to fight the Ukrainian government or on behalf of Ukraine? A very complex set of issues that is impacted by the war and I would love your thoughts on that.

MR. BYMAN: Sure. And to stress not only complex but I think certainly what I'm going to say is speculation. But there is a lot of uncertainty and this could go in lots of different directions. We have a lot of snapshots but at least I don't have a great sense of the whole and I don't think that's actually known right now. So, I think we have to be careful with conclusions we draw.

Let me start by saying what I think we all know, which is Russia likes to play on extremes. And pit extreme sides of a conflict against one another and increase overall instability. So, you know, going way back in U.S. politics, Russia not only put a bet on Donald Trump early, but they also put a bet on Jill Stein, who was an extreme left-wing candidate. And she didn't materialize in any way. But they were willing to back, you know, both sides of different protests and so on with propaganda and encouragement.

And so, it's not surprising that Russia has tried to encourage an array of right-wing actors and this has been especially true in Europe. So, we do see I think much more limited encouragement in the United States. But there have been attackers in Sweden who received training in Russia. There are motorcycle gangs that have right-wing ties like the Night Wolves that have links to Russia. And, of course, there are numerous political parties including major ones such as, you know, the National Front in France that have had significant ties to Russia as well.

So, you have a lot of connections. I wouldn't say all this has amounted to a massive campaign though. I think it's Russia largely was trying to sow chaos agents as it's done in a wide variety of ways and expand its influence. And the joy of social media is that Russia was able to do this relatively cheaply. That it wasn't something they had to put massive resources into.

So, to add Ukraine to this, during the, if you want to call it the first Ukraine war, after the 2014 kind of conflict in the Donbas and so on, we start to see white supremacists show up to fight, but on both sides. And so, this, I think, has not kind of gotten the recognition it deserves that it wasn't a clearcut white supremacist conflict one way or another. It wasn't kind of white people against Black people, right? It was something that was you could read into different aspects of the white supremacist struggle different

things, whether it's, you know, defending Christendom and so on. But you had to kind of go to extreme lengths. It wasn't clearcut.

So, right now there are a couple possibilities. First of all, this has hurt the image of Russia in the west. So, some of the admiration we saw of Russia that this is masculine Christianity and Putin being, you know, against the LGBTQ community. Putin in general kind of standing up to political correctness. That's still there but it's certainly diminished by the invasion of Ukraine.

And there's also much more efforts by western security services to monitor possible linkages to Russia. So, so, they are concerned for a whole variety of reasons, not just white supremacy, but there's a lot more attention and resources to that. And that's going to really matter as well. But, of course, the conflict in Ukraine has mobilized lots of people. And some of them openly have links to white supremacists. It's a little more complex because one of the heroes that's emerged from the conflict is the Jewish president of Ukraine.

So, it's been a little harder to kind of make this narrative about white supremacy. But you still see some white supremacists going. They're gaining military experience, some degree of training. I will say those volunteers are dwarfed by people who have no interest or reject the white supremacist agenda. It's not something that's dominating it.

So, what will happen to the small, but nevertheless real number of fighters after this is an open question. I'm skeptical of drawing too many analogies from the jihadist movement and that foreign fighter diaspora. But it is still something to watch. And a lot, of course, is simply going to depend on how this conflict plays out and I do think that Russia will be increasingly desperate to lash back against the United States and the West in general as it suffers tremendous casualties and tremendous losses. And I do think there are a lot of uncontrolled elements going into Ukraine right now. So, I would kind of end this, you know, unnecessarily long answer by saying this is very much a space to watch. But I don't think we can draw too many conclusions right now.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Thank you, Dan. So, we have received in advance tons of questions for our panel. I am very gratified to see this tremendous interest. Obviously, we will not have the capacity in the next 20 minutes to get to tons of questions. And we are also continuing to receive live questions.

So, what I will do is to pick some of the issues that we haven't touched on or we haven't touched on in depth, and cluster questions and types of questions together. And let me just pose the questions to the panel and anyone who would like to give an answer, please do so.

So, we received several questions about the issue and role of antisemitism in the United States and white supremacy. I would love your reflections on that and add a second part it was another set of questions that have come about what is being done to protect Black people? Are the policies specifically protecting Black people adequate or are they not adequate? And are we seeing the emergence of any armed militias and actors along minority communities or LGBT communities, for example? Anyone who would like to take any of those issues.

MR. BERGER: Sure, I'll jump in for a little bit of this. So, that's kind of a big mouthful of questions there. So, I'm not going to probably be able to address all of them. I think that, you know, I think antisemitism certainly is, you know, many of us understand it as a barometer, you know, for other kinds of extremism. And what we see generally is that the mechanisms of extremism, this is a big area of my study is the mechanisms of extremism are structural. So, it's an ingroup that is validating and insisting on violent action against an outgroup.

And if you learn it for one group, you can learn it for another group. And so, where I'm particularly concerned about this right now is in LGBTQIA-plus communities are obviously being targeted by domestic right-wing mainstream politicians, let alone extremists. I think that this is like tremendously dangerous both for people in those communities and also for, you know, teaching people the mechanisms of hate and extremism to which they will then apply to ever increasing numbers of groups.

So, I think, you know, just sort of in that broad sense I think, you know, we really, these are not separate movements where it's not like a separate anti-trans movement from white supremacist movements. They are substantially overlapping movements. And we need to watch out for how they coalesce.

MS. BEIRICH: Let me just jump in. I want to completely endorse what J.M. just said about the way that we have all these different kinds of hatred and bigotry in various communities that are coalescing. And the trans issue in particular has become quite vicious among right-wing extremists. And, of course, that has been elevated by politicians who are going after trans athletes, bathroom bills, all this

kind of stuff that's in the mainstream.

Let me talk just for a second about the antisemitism part of your question. You know, we have seen antisemitism, of course, has been at the heart of white supremacy forever, right? And at the heart of -- I mean, this is like a centuries long thing. We could talk about, you know, Catholic extremism in prior eras and assaults on Jews and so on. But the number of attacks against Jews in a lot of western countries is on the rise. And antisemitism has been layered over some new types of conspiracies and ideas that are out there. I guess this is always inevitable for right-wing extremists.

But, you know, I just want to highlight the fact that the Great Replacement has a version that is antisemitic in which Jews are specifically responsible for displacing white people. And, you know, I think people often don't realize that the attack in Pittsburgh at the Tree of Life Synagogue, the gunman was actually going after the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society's offices in there. He was targeting Jews who he believed were bringing, you know, non-white immigrants into the United States, in particular, Syrian refugees I think at the time.

There's also been QAnon, which, of course, is an insane, you know, this crazy conspiracy theory of Democrats and child trafficking rings and Trump as a hero also has an antisemitic version. So, we're seeing more and more strains of antisemitism added to this sort of, you know, far right crazy stew. And I think it makes the lives of Jews incredibly more precarious than they were before as targets for violence. And we shouldn't forget that a lot of the Great Replacement attacks in multiple countries were targeted at Jews.

And just let me touch for one second on the question about protections for Black people. I once had a conversation in Bennie Thompson's offices. You know, he's leading the January 6 Commission. In which he said I want to do something to stop Black people from being killed. This was about 10 years ago about white supremacy. And I have to say that so many of the policies to deal with the issues related to white supremacy have been stymied over the years. I mean, there's an attempt to pass a domestic terrorism bill, you know, that got through the House and is not going to make it to the Senate just recently.

We've had advances though in terms of resources put to fighting white supremacy, additional staff at the FBI, and, you know, more DHS efforts and so on. But we should never forget that

the Black population is usually the most victimized by hate crime and faces a precariousness in this country as well from these movements. And, you know, and there have been multiple mass attacks against Black people and, of course, we can go back to the Civil Rights Era, which was one after another after another. But we shouldn't forget either what happened in Charleston with the shooting there at the EAM Church.

MR. BYMAN: Let me chime in with two points. First, I realize as a professor and an analyst, I'm expected to say this. But I really want to stress the importance of good data and how bad our data are. So, really basic questions of how many attacks are there, right? Or things like vandalism of a Black church or a mosque, is that going up or is that going down? Not only are bad, but they tend to be inversely bad with to the extent of the problem. Where if you have a community with a lot of racism, often the statistics there and reporting there is worse than in one that doesn't have much racism.

So, you'll have communities that really care about this problem that will dutifully report relatively low-level problems. And communities that don't care that will ignore high-level ones. So, if you look at the numbers, it looks like some areas that are, you know, by comparison good, are actually much worse than the ones that actually have real problems. And is true internationally. So, the United Kingdom by European standards does a very good job collecting data compared to several countries in say Eastern Europe, Poland, for example.

So, you do see a lot of issues in countries like Poland, but they're not recorded the way they are in the U.K. And so, the numbers mislead dramatically. So, it's very hard to tell the extent of the problems whether and, you know, add to that some communities have very legitimate reasons to be distrustful of the police. So, you're going to probably see less reporting of low-level issues from the Black community, say, than you will from any other communities that are vulnerable because of historic discrimination. So, it distorts many of our numbers and as a result, can have big impacts on resources.

And let me say a brief point on community self-defense organizations. Obviously, this is tremendously understandable when your community is victimized. It's usually a mistake. Part of me, first of all, is against any vigilante justice or the idea of taking law into your own hands, but even putting that aside, it's often cited as justification for violence by the other side. It's proof that your intentions are dangerous. It's never interpreted as defensive. And it justifies violence. What we want is, of course, law

enforcement with legitimate authority to act decisively. And so, that should be the focus rather than kind of everyone taking up firearms to defend themselves and making the overall problem worse.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Thank you, Dan. I would like to very much endorse that. Having studied militias that emerge in response on violence around the world, I can say that it very rarely ends well both for the community and for the national politics. While fully understandable, it creates enormous problems and tends to just intensify violence in very many different ways not simply one.

Let me again bundle a few questions as I am very cognizant of time. And let me just read one question quite verbatim. This came from a gentleman. I am currently living in Mexico City. And I have been surprised to see a shocking variety of neo-Nazi patches, pins, as well as clothing with phrases and insignias and paraphernalia of white supremacist groups. How is it that people in Mexico can subscribe to white supremacy movements, even neo-Nazism, even as those groups target people of color?

So, that's one question to anyone on the panel. It doesn't have to be limited to Mexico. The complexities of race. You know, can you have Black white supremacists? Can you have Mexicans that are embracing white supremacy? How is that being done?

And related to that, then, is a very complex question that I would like to pose on the table. And that's the issue of prevention. J.M. was already telling us earlier that a lot of the preventing extreme terrorism, countering extremist violence, policies, and efforts to which tens of billions of dollars have been dedicated since 9/11 have been ineffective. And we can say really the same about many similar policies against gangs. Such as gangs, criminal gangs, in Central America. Tremendous amount of money has gone into those programs and sometimes the recognition has become, that the best thing that can be achieved is for a gang member to go cold. Never sever links, never sever membership, but not act violently.

Conversely, from the spaces like efforts to prevent drug use, or obesity, or bullying we know often that very early intervention at the ages of five, six, seven, eight, are most effective, yet they're still very little effective. So, what kind of lessons can we do about the prevention, the deradicalization or preventing radicalization space in schools, very basic schools? What are the good places of intervention? What has worked? What has not worked? J.M. tantalizingly said there have been some

improvements lately. What are those improvements?

MR. BERGER: So, you know, I think areas where we've improved is sort of identifying much more modest goals for some of these activities. And I think the start of what you -- the framing of this question that you mentioned is really the key, which is that are you seeking to deradicalize people or are you seeking to disengage them from violent actions, from radical action?

So, you know, deradicalizing somebody means changing their heart and soul and their thoughts and minds and that's very hard to do. It's very hard to quantify how successful you've been. You should be trying to change people's hearts and minds. But your policy goals should be disengagement. There's the, you know, they can be a jerk but if they stay home then we'll call that a win. So, I think, you know, inasmuch as we are able to divert people off of networks in sort of much more blunt ways and get them to stay home, that's really that's a win.

As far as, you know, the Mexico City question and, you know, there's a lot of different things that can fit into that. There's certainly a phenomenon called outgroup favoritism, which is when people in a group, a racial, religious, or social group like people who are not in their group better than they like people who are in their group. There is also the fungibility of whiteness, which is that, you know, whiteness is an entirely social construct. Something that, you know, I will say as somebody who grew up in rural America, it took me a while to understand that. If you think you're white, then you're going to -- you'll be fine with white supremacy. You know, you're not going to have an intrinsic problem with white supremacy. So, a lot of these groups either will have their own they're choosing neo-Nazi principles to push back against their own defined outgroups or they just think they're part of the same ingroup even when other people in that group don't think so.

So, it's complicated and messy and there's, you know, I would not be able to capture it all in here. But it's a quite interesting topic and some of my forthcoming work will look at some of these issues.

MR. BYMAN: I'll add just briefly the broader globalization of many of these symbols. And so, the ability of, you know, whether it's neo-Nazi ideas or others to kind of show up around the world is quite striking. I don't want to claim any expertise on Mexico. But the proliferation of Nazi imagery in places like Russia and Eastern Europe is striking, right? I mean, these are countries that suffered horribly

from Nazi invasion and occupation. And yet, you see these ideas, you know, and symbols spreading.

For those of you who follow the occupy movement in Ottawa, the confederate flag shows up in Canada, right? And so, there is a sense of these symbols for what they are literally tied to for many of us who are part of this session, of course, we know the history and background of this. But then there is a sense of these as simply antiauthority symbols that are ways, first of all of just angering people, which is part of the goal in provoking. But also, of showing a degree of defiance. And they work, right? I mean, it does produce that outrage. That is part of what many of these groups and individuals seek.

MS. BEIRICH: I just wanted to add a short thing. I mean, people -- most people probably don't realize or don't pay close attention, but Enrique Tarrío, the head of the Proud Boys, is not classically white, right? He's a Cuban, right? And so these, I think J.M. said it right, these definitions of the social construct of whiteness shift and we have, indeed, had Black white supremacists and Jewish neo-Nazis and all kinds of things like this. And I'm not an expert on Mexico as well, but there are, of course, racial hierarchies in other countries that latch onto these symbols and you see them. You see them in other places. It's funny the place I've seen the confederate flag where it really struck me as odd was in Croatia. It certainly had no reason for being there.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: The last question is an enormous question but has come up several times in the questions that we have received. Is the United States on the verge of civil war? I recently was at a conference that dealt with U.S.-Mexico issues and a prominent professor of civil war concluded that many of the characteristics that put a country on the verge of civil war are present in the United States. I hope that is not the case, but more importantly, we all have to do everything to make sure that this doesn't happen and that existing levels of violence are not tolerated and are effectively countered and that they diminish. But I would love your reflections, Heidi, J.M., and Dan about these issues in the concluding minute, minute and half per speaker.

MS. BEIRICH: Well, I don't know if it's civil war, but I am very, very concerned about political violence in the country. You know, according to some calculations, there's maybe 20 million Americans who could be considered part of an insurrectionist block in the United States who believe in things like the great replacement. Violence is necessary for political change. I don't know that they get activated. But I think it's going to be a very bumpy couple of years as our electoral system comes under

pressure from the kinds of forces like you saw in the hearings last night. And that's probably my main concern going forward. What that's going to mean for our democracy. Do the institutions survive that pressure?

MR. BERGER: So, yeah, I mean, I don't know. I would never -- I wouldn't rule out a civil war. But I think that what's more likely is a years of lead kind of scenario. Where there's just really dramatically heightened political violence in this country. I think maybe even better comparison, and Dan can talk about this, is the post-reconstruction era in this country where there was not only a huge amount of racial violence and political violence, but it also dramatically set back our policies and politics. And resulted in a country that was less free and less fair. So, those are my worries. I, you know, I can't, I don't have a crystal ball. Civil war maybe, but I think one of those scenarios is more likely.

MR. BYMAN: Yeah, I'll simply echo and say that it's, you know, we can focus on the worst case of all out civil war. And I hope, feel better by saying at least it's, you know, I think in my view, highly unlikely. But that can't be ignored as more likely cases that are actually quite disturbing.

And in addition to kind of more violence in general, I would highlight the risk of violence at the state and local level. The idea of challenging the legitimacy of the elections and the kind of choosing force to do so, is much more accepted, right? And we're seeing hearings on this now. And the dismissal of these hearings by parts of the political spectrum is very disturbing and that's going to vary by part of the country. But if you have an election that is highly disputed, you are going to see immediately people trying to rally in the "stop the steal" sort of way in parts of the country and with that comes the greater legitimacy of taking what they would say is justice into your own hands.

And that doesn't mean that, you know, the country falls into massive chaos. But it does mean lives lost. It does mean institutions further discredited and as this happens, it increases the chance of it happening again. So, to me this is an incredibly disturbing moment in modern U.S. history.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: And let me echo those words. I too, I am not -- I do not consider it very likely that civil war in the United States would break out. But that doesn't mean that we can be complacent about a very grave and very dangerous situation that the United States is in. The kind of levels of violence are not tolerable but they are echoing in different ways. It's not just that politicians get intimidated when they're trying to run for office. Politicians choose now not to run because they are afraid

they will be attacked by extremist ideas and perhaps even extremist weapons.

So, I thank you all very much for engaging with us today in this very important conversation. We were extremely pleased with the level of questions that we have received. I understand that we were able to give just teasers of answers, but do not despair, go read everything that Heidi, Dan, and J.M. have written. You can read them both in a very gripping novel fiction approaches like J.M.'s book, "Optimal," as well as in the more policy treatise by Heidi and by Dan, including in his latest book, "Spreading Hate: The Global Rise of White Supremacist Terrorism."

Enormous thanks to Dan, J.M., Heidi for your frankness, your very thoughtful answers, and the conversation. And I look forward to our continuing our engagement and our conversation.

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Expires: November 30, 2024