

# politic event

*by* Polit Politi

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**Submission date:** 09-Aug-2021 08:15PM (UTC-0400)

**Submission ID:** 1629728533

**File name:** meland\_Security\_warns\_of\_potential\_conspiracy\_theory.edited.docx (23.55K)

**Word count:** 1466

**Character count:** 8857

Homeland Security warns of elected-fuelled violence this month

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According to a local police source, the government security agencies warned authorities on Friday of an upsurge in cyber violent threats in conjunction with election-related conspiracies. To prevent internet threats from turning into violent crimes, the Department of Homeland Security released a press safety advisory to security agencies across the country.

"Reports indicate that these activities could take place in August 2021, while we do not have particular plots or planned actions." On Wednesday, a senior official at the Department of Homeland Security informed members of Congress that the conspiracy theory that Donald Trump would be restored as president in August had sparked concern. John Cohen, the department's chief counterterrorism official, briefed members-only of the House Committee on Homeland Security. POLITICO spoke with three individuals who were present during the briefing. They desired anonymity to discuss intimate conversations (Bevan, 2021).

According to a department spokeswoman, "the Department of Homeland Security interacts regularly with federal officials about the elevated threat environment in order to guarantee the security of all citizens across the nation." The DHS Office of Intelligence and Analysis, according to the spokeswoman, <sup>2</sup> issued a Public Safety Preparedness Notification to national, regional, and local agencies. According to the spokesman, the United States is presently in a high-risk environment for terrorism, and the DHS is knowledgeable of previous violence incidents linked to the propagation of misinformation and conspiracies around the 2020 election (Bevan, 2021). According to the source, the national <sup>2</sup> government has been aware for weeks of online rumours advocating for reinstatement, notably on forums that propagate conspiracy theories, such as QAnon, and on extremist media. While the speculations are "small," the source expressed concern that they are being "stitched into

requests for violence," emphasizing the significance of raising public awareness of the problem across the US.

The Department of Homeland Security is particularly concerned that perpetrators and limited groups of people would read these conspiracies as permission to behave violently in the current threat environment. In specific internet discussions, the date of February 7 is mentioned. According to the source, <sup>2</sup> there are also threats of violence outbreak in Washington, DC, and capital cities across the nation. Another conspiracy idea, according to the source, revolves around the imminent FEMA test of the nationwide emergency warning system, which some are misinterpreting as a "go code." More meetings involving the FBI, DHS, state, and local law enforcement would be convened following the notification's distribution to analyze the threat and determine whether other actions are needed to mitigate the individual added risk. Extremists are threatening violence "if desired goals are not fulfilled," according to a communication obtained by ABC News from the <sup>4</sup> Department of Homeland Security's Office of Intelligence and Analysis (Sophia, 2021).

Threats of retaliatory violence have acquired "much more public attention" on the internet in recent days. "Conversations and ideas have migrated away from conspiracy and extremist online communities and are now being discussed <sup>1</sup> on web forums, or more public web forums, and even inside a media ecosystem," the official explained. Conspiracy theorists have constantly predicted that the results of the 2020 election will be dismissed in August (Sophia, 2021). Mr. Trump has aided in spreading the false narrative by claiming extensive <sup>1</sup> voter fraud without presenting evidence. Supporters such as Lindell, inventor of MyPillow, and Rudy Giuliani have spread Republican voter conspiracy theories alleging <sup>1</sup> that voting machines were hacked and dead people voted. The DHS indicated that it has no evidence of a deliberate strike.

"Previous occurrences have demonstrated that demands for violence can spread<sup>1</sup> rapidly in the public domain and emerge outside of publicly accessible channels." As a result, lone offenders and small groups of persons may act violently without warning," according to the letter distributed to state and local law enforcement organizations. "As public awareness<sup>1</sup> of the themes increases, we are concerned that additional appeals to violence will arise.

According to the DHS source, they learned from the January 6 insurgency that preparations for violent attacks "may be spread through public forums." Rep. Elissa Slotkin (D-Mich.) pressed Cohen throughout the briefing on how<sup>3</sup> the Department of Homeland Security monitors the spread of disinformation and the role of speech in inciting violence. She specifically referenced the conspiracy theory that Trump will be re-elected in August, a concept that Trump has promoted.

According to Cohen, the DHS is unaware of any specific credible threats of violence related to the conspiracy theory surrounding Trump's reinstatement. However, he did highlight that the Department of Homeland Security is monitoring online talks about the subject among extremist communities. And he said it's creating alarm among department officials because it reinforces the false idea that the election was rigged - a narrative that could elicit a violent response from extremists (Sophia, 2021). The briefing's subject was domestic terrorism. On the other hand, Cohen received a high volume of inquiries from members regarding violent crime, which is projected to rise in 2020 and 2021. According to Cohen, DHS Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas has directed employees to explore the reasons for violence within the department's mission. Earlier last week, the Biden administration presented a strategy to combat violent crime.

Conspiracy theorists, including Mike Lindell, the pillow mogul who frequently appears in Fox News advertisements, have asserted in recent months that Trump will be

reinstated as president in August. Trump has told associates that he expects to be reinstalled as president by the end of the summer, according to the New York Times's Maggie Haberman and National Review. Trump arrived at that conclusion, Lindell of The Daily Beast reports, since he campaigned for it. According to MSNBC commentator Charlie Sykes, the August date is "based on speculation and conspiratorial notions about nonexistent election fraud in Arizona and a delusory hope that the Supreme Court will nullify the election." "If Trump is referring to August, it is most likely because he overheard me say it publicly," Lindell continued (Sophia, 2021). Following the publication of this story, a DHS official released a statement to POLITICO reiterating the department's commitment to countering disinformation. "DHS is strengthening its capacity to prevent acts of violence motivated by disinformation, conspiracy theories, and extremist narratives conveyed via social media and other online platforms," a spokesperson said.

According to a recent Morning Consult poll, roughly three Republican voters believe in the conspiracy theory. It delves into the same election-rigging beliefs that motivated the January 6 attack on the US Capitol. Republicans in Congress successfully blocked a move to establish a 9/11-style commission to investigate the attack. This morning, Nancy Pelosi, the Speaker of the House, announced that she would convene a select committee to investigate the event. Meanwhile, the Biden administration has made domestic terrorism a priority. The White House released a strategy plan describing its approach to the problem earlier this month.

Additionally, the Department of Homeland Security has developed specialized intelligence analysts dedicated only to the subject (Geneva, 2021). On the other hand, civil liberties groups are concerned about greater government surveillance of First Amendment-protected activity and potential disparate consequences on poor populations. Cohen's briefing

<sup>5</sup> follows a New York Times and National Review report earlier this month that Trump informed aides he could return to the White House by the end of the summer. Other prominent conspiracy theorists have endorsed the reinstatement theory, including MyPillow CEO Mike Lindell, who recently told Rolling Stone that Trump would be president in months and that the country would "be entering its greatest revival in history." To be clear, as Insider previously noted, the conspiracy hypothesis has no constitutional basis (Geneva, 2021).

The Supreme Court cannot annul a presidential election. The sole option to remove a sitting president is through impeachment, in which case the vice president takes office. <sup>3</sup> "The Department of Homeland Security is concentrating its efforts on the relationship between violence and extremist ideology, as well as hateful and false narratives," a department official told Politico in a statement (Geneva, 2021). "DHS is strengthening its capacity to prevent acts of violence inspired by disinformation, conspiracy theories, and extremist narratives conveyed over social media and other online channels," according to The New York Times. He asked followers to look forward to "2024 or before" in a Tuesday tweet decrying the "very phony" 2020 election, according to Insider's Mia Jankowicz. Numerous lawsuits have established that allegations of electoral fraud are false, according to Jankowicz.

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