

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 8, 2020

The Honorable Christopher Wray
Director
Federal Bureau of Investigation
Washington, D.C. 20035

Mr. Joseph B. Maher
Principal Deputy General Counsel
Senior Official Performing the Duties of the Undersecretary
Office of Intelligence and Analysis
Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20593

Dear Director Wray and Mr. Maher,

We write to request a written assessment on the threat posed by QAnon. As the FBI, the U.S. House of Representatives, and multiple organizations and researchers have detailed, QAnon conspiracy theories have inspired acts of domestic extremism and violence, sought to undermine democratic institutions, and contributed to hatred in the United States and overseas. There is also reporting indicating that foreign influence operations have contributed to the dissemination of QAnon conspiracy theories.

As the FBI has confirmed, QAnon poses a direct threat of violence. In congressional testimony on September 17, 2020, Director Wray described QAnon as a “complex set of conspiracy theories,” noting “certainly we have had cases, properly predicated investigations involving violence where people have been motivated by some of those conspiracy theories.” On October 2, 2020, the U.S. House of Representatives passed H. Res. 1154 condemning QAnon and rejecting the conspiracy theories it promotes. The resolution, which passed by a vote of 371-18, described multiple cases in which QAnon inspired acts of violence.

QAnon has also been active in attacking U.S. democratic institutions, including disseminating false conspiracy theories about the November 2020 U.S. election. While these conspiracy theories have been debunked by the Department of Homeland Security, they contribute to the spread of disinformation that poses a threat to U.S. democracy.¹

Multiple organizations and scholars have warned of the threat posed by QAnon. A study published by the Combating Terrorism Center at the United States Military Academy at West Point concluded that “QAnon is arguably no longer simply a fringe conspiracy theory but an ideology that has demonstrated its capacity to radicalize to violence individuals at an alarming

¹ “QAnon’s Dominion voter fraud conspiracy theory reaches the president,” *NBCNews*, November 13, 2020

speed.”² Another study, by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, described “belief in certain conspiracy theories, such as QAnon” as part of the threat of far-right terrorism.³ The Anti-Defamation League has characterized QAnon as “an extremist movement that fuels antisemitism and promotes misinformation and hate in an effort to undermine our democratic process.” The Southern Poverty Law Center has described it as a “sprawling spiderweb of right-wing internet conspiracy theories with anti-Semitic and anti-LGBTQ elements...”

The threat posed by QAnon is not limited to the United States. QAnon has also gained a foothold in Europe, in particular in Germany where its adherents overlap with the country’s far right and anti-Semitic fringe.⁴ These developments present a danger to U.S. interests by contributing to a terrorist threat and undermining the democratic institutions of U.S. allies.

In addition to requesting analysis on the threat posed by QAnon in the United States and abroad, we ask that you provide intelligence on the role of foreign influence actors in nurturing and amplifying QAnon. According to an independent analysis of Twitter archives, an account that retweeted obscure Russian officials appeared to be the first account to use the term “Q Anon” on social media, on November 2, 2017. The same analysis found that “Russian accounts began amplifying the [QAnon] movement as it started,” and that “[f]rom November 2017 on, QAnon was the single most frequent hashtag tweeted by accounts that Twitter has since identified as Russian-backed.”⁵ As H. Res. 1154 stressed, the Intelligence Community should seek to “uncover any foreign support, assistance, or online amplification QAnon receives, as well as any QAnon affiliations, coordination, and contacts with foreign extremist organizations or groups espousing violence.”

Given this and other reporting, we request that you provide to Congress a written assessment of the threat posed by QAnon, in the United States and abroad, and on the role of foreign influence operations in the inception and amplification of QAnon conspiracy theories. We further request that this assessment be made public, with any classified matters provided separately to Congress through appropriate channels.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

/s/ Martin Heinrich

Martin Heinrich
United States Senator

/s/ Tammy Baldwin

Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator

/s/ Charles E. Schumer

Charles E. Schumer
United States Senator

/s/ Ron Wyden

Ron Wyden
United States Senator

² “The QAnon Conspiracy Theory: A Security Threat in the Making?” CTCSENTINAL, July 2020

³ “The War Comes Home: The Evolution of Domestic Terrorism in the United States,” October 22, 2020

⁴ “QAnon is Thriving in Germany. The Extreme Right is Delighted.” *The New York Times*, October 11, 2020

⁵ “QAnon posts were promoted by Russia-linked accounts as early as November 2017,” *Reuters*, November 2, 2020

/s/ Elizabeth Warren

Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

/s/ Bernard Sanders

Bernard Sanders
United States Senator

/s/ Tammy Duckworth

Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator

/s/ Sherrod Brown

Sherrod Brown
United States Senator

/s/ Gary C. Peters

Gary C. Peters
United States Senator

/s/ Jack Reed

Jack Reed
United States Senator

/s/ Richard Blumenthal

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

/s/ Edward J. Markey

Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

/s/ Patrick Leahy

Patrick Leahy
United States Senator

/s/ Richard J. Durbin

Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator