

Department of Homeland Security counterterrorism strategy targets left-wing politics as “violent extremism”

Kevin Reed**23 September 2019**

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has issued a new strategy document entitled, “Framework for Countering Terrorism and Targeted Violence” which expands the definition of terrorism to include what it calls “domestic actors inspired by violent extremist ideologies.”

The document was released by acting Secretary of Homeland Security Kevin K. McAleenan on September 20 during an event to announce the strategy that was cohosted by two important think-tanks of the American ruling establishment, the Brookings Institution and the Heritage Foundation.

Although the document references recent right-wing violence and mass shootings in the United States, it does so in order to arrive at a key conclusion: the state apparatus previously erected after the attacks of September 11, 2001 in the name of the “war on terror” is now being redirected against domestic social and political opposition in the name of fighting “anti-authority and anti-government violent extremism.”

The attempt to identify left-wing and socialist political organizations with “violent extremism” is spelled out in relationship to opponents of US immigration policy. The DHS document gives the example of an event in July 2019 where “an anarchist claiming affiliation with the ‘antifa’ movement” allegedly attempted to firebomb a US Immigrations and Customs Enforcement facility in Tacoma, Washington and threatened to shoot law enforcement officers as evidence of its claims.

The document then goes on to state, “In recent years, adherents to particular violent extremist ideologies have sometimes abandoned them for other ideologies with similar sets of perceived enemies.” In other words,

workers and young people who go through political experiences and begin to draw broader socialist revolutionary conclusions from their struggles should be identified as “domestic terrorists.”

That the purpose of the updated DHS strategy is to connect political opposition with violent extremism was articulated by acting Secretary McAleenan in releasing the 34-page document. “While the threat posed by foreign terrorist organizations like the Islamic State and al-Qaeda persists,” he said, “we are acutely aware of the growing threat from enemies, both foreign and domestic, who seek to incite violence in our Nation’s youth, disenfranchised, and disaffected, in order to attack their fellow citizens and fray at the seams of our diverse social fabric.”

McAleenan’s reference to the danger that the youth, disenfranchised and disaffected can cause the “social fabric” of American society to “fray at the seams” is highly significant. The most conscious elements within the state—who are entrusted by the ruling elite with protecting and defending the capitalist “homeland”—have concluded that the US is on the brink of significant social and political struggles and that preparations must be made to suppress them. Above all, this means identifying left-wing and socialist political organizations and groups with “violent extremism.”

Permeating the DHS strategy is the conception that the methods deployed outside the country in the aftermath of 9/11 must now be used to confront the growth of mass social and political struggle within the US. For example, the document states in the Executive Summary, “In an age of online radicalization to violent extremism and disparate threats, we must not only counter foreign enemies trying to strike us from abroad,

but also those enemies, foreign and domestic, that seek to spur to violence our youth and our disaffected—encouraging them to strike in the heart of our Nation, and attack the unity of our vibrant, diverse American society.”

Taken to its logical conclusion this means that the military-intelligence apparatus is preparing to use the methods pioneered under the “war on terror” against anyone seeking to demonstrate the class character of American society and expose the fraudulent national unity between the working class and the ruling class.

Furthermore, in footnote, the DHS provides a definition of “domestic terrorism” that ties “unlawful violence, or a threat of force of violence” to efforts to “effect societal, political, or other change, committed by a group or person based and operating entirely within the United States or its territories.” It says that the Federal Government’s conventional definition of a domestic terrorist—known as Homegrown Violent Extremists (HVEs) who have been inspired by Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs)—no longer applies in the present situation.

The footnote states, “It should be noted that many groups and individuals defined as ‘domestic terrorists’ are becoming increasingly transnational in outlook and activities.” Clearly, the DHS is seeking to identify socialist international political affiliation with “violent extremism.”

The shift in strategy by the DHS confirms that warnings made by the *World Socialist Web Site* over the past eighteen years that the dispensing with democratic and international laws in the course of the “war on terror” would, sooner or later, be directed against American citizens especially those who oppose government policies.

As is clear from the DHS statement, measures such as the declaration that “enemy combatants” are exempt from the provisions of the Geneva Conventions or that endless detention without trial at the military detention camp at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba in violation of the US Constitution are now being prepared against American citizens.

The DHS’s identification of left-wing and oppositional political movements with violent extremism in the US is part of a growing international trend. The German Secret Service (Verfassungsschutz) has maintained a list of “left-wing extremist” groups as

“objects of observation” by the state.

As is also the case in the US, all of the major parties of Germany’s ruling establishment have encouraged the development of extreme right-wing and neo-fascist political parties, the primary preoccupation of the state is the growth of support for socialist politics within the working class and among students.

While US President Donald Trump has repeatedly encouraged violence by the extreme right-wing elements among his supporters, the Democrats as well as the corporate media have sought to downplay the connection between the White House and fascistic political tendencies. Above all, it is the emergence of an independent political movement of the working class based on the principles of socialist internationalism that is recognized by the state as a grave threat to the capitalist system.



To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:
wsws.org/contact