

In Senate hearing

FBI Director Wray confirms coordinated planning by pro-Trump far-right terrorists in January 6 attack

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On Tuesday, Federal Bureau of Investigation Director Christopher Wray testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee on the FBI's role in the January 6 siege of the US Capitol.

The hearing followed congressional hearings held last week in which Washington D.C. police chiefs defended their failure to secure the Capitol in the lead-up and on the day of the attempted coup orchestrated by Donald Trump, attributing the ability of the fascistic mob to storm the building and delay certification of the 2020 election result to an “intelligence” or “communication” failure.

In his testimony Wray confirmed that:

- Militia “extremists” coordinated and pre-planned the assault on Congress.

- There is no evidence that Antifa forces, masquerading as Trump supporters, spearheaded the assault on the Capitol—a conspiracy theory promoted by a number of Republican congressmen as well as far-right groups.

- FBI intelligence reports were disseminated to the Capitol Police and the Metro D.C. Police prior to January 6.

- The FBI failed to issue a “threat assessment” prior to January 6.

- FBI and Department of Homeland Security intelligence reports warning of “violence” in relation to the election, the certification of the Electoral College vote, and the inauguration were issued to relevant police departments in December of 2020.

Critical issues that were left unanswered by the hearing and

Wray's testimony include:

- Why did the FBI fail to issue an official “threat assessment”?

- Why was there a de facto standdown of security forces outside the Capitol on January 6?

- What actions did the FBI take once the assault on the Capitol began?

- Why did it take hours for National Guard soldiers to be deployed?

The January 6 joint session of Congress, presided over by Vice President Mike Pence and tasked with officially counting the Electoral College vote, had been targeted by Trump and his co-conspirators as the last chance to overturn Trump's defeat. Trump had called on his far-right supporters to mobilize that day, explicitly instructing the Proud Boys to “stand back and stand by,” and promising that the “Stop the Steal” event would be “wild.” It was well known within military, intelligence and police circles that thousands were planning to descend on the US Capitol, many carrying arms.

Given these facts, compounded by the presence in the Capitol on January 6 of the three officials next in line after the president in the “continuity of government” line of succession—the vice president, the speaker of the House and the president pro tempore of the Senate—the failure of the FBI to issue an official threat assessment prior to January 6 is an extraordinary omission that raises many questions.

Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Dick Durbin (Democrat from Illinois) opened the hearing by noting the historically unprecedented character of the attack on Congress. “For the first time ever we have failed to have a peaceful

transfer of power,” he said.

He then proceeded to declare his support for the prosecution of Antifa and others supposedly responsible for “left-wing violence” during last summer’s mass protests against police violence.

Durbin began his questioning of Wray by expressing his “surprise” that the FBI failed to issue a threat assessment in advance of January 6. In this connection, he pointed to the January 5 memo from the Norfolk, Virginia FBI office citing social media traffic showing that pro-Trump insurrectionists were planning for “war” at the Capitol and had obtained maps of the tunnels under the Capitol complex.

Wray dodged the question of his failure to issue a threat assessment, noting instead that the Norfolk memo had been forwarded via email to the Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF) within the D.C. Metropolitan Police and Capitol police within an hour of its being issued.

Durbin set the tone for the rest of the panel members, Democratic as well as Republican, by profusely praising Wray and the FBI for their “hard work” and “dedicated service” to the nation.

In the course of his testimony, Wray acknowledged the central role of organized far-right militia groups in the siege of the Capitol on January 6. He said there were “three groups of people” involved in the events of January 6. Wray characterized “the largest group” as “mostly peaceful, rowdy protesters.” A second, smaller group was “swept-up in emotion” and committed “low-level criminal behavior,” he said. A third group, according to Wray, was the “smallest and most serious.”

This group “breached the Capitol grounds, engaged in violence against law enforcement and attempted to disrupt members of Congress and the conduct of their constitutional responsibilities.” Wray continued, “Those people clearly came to Washington... with plans and intentions to engage in the worst kind of violence.”

In a revealing back-and-forth with Democratic Senator Amy Klobuchar, Wray confirmed the content of court documents cited by Klobuchar pertaining to the ongoing case of Proud Boy leader Ethan Nordean. The March 1 filing by federal prosecutors, who are seeking to keep Nordean in detention pending trial, details the Proud Boys’ assault on the Capitol, including the breach of certain parts of the building that had the weakest security and the group’s use of Chinese-made Baofeng radios to communicate along encrypted channels during the attack.

The filing notes: “[Nordean]—dressed all in black, wearing a tactical vest—led the Proud Boys through the use of encrypted communications and military-style equipment and he led them with the specific plans to: split up into groups, attempt to break into the Capitol building from as many different points as possible, and prevent the Joint Session of Congress from Certifying the Electoral College results.”

The document also notes that in the wake of the arrest of Proud Boys Chairman Henry “Enrique” Tarrío on January 4, Nordean “was nominated from within to have ‘war powers’ and to take ultimate leadership of the Proud Boys’ activities on Jan 6.”

Prosecutors allege that certain Proud Boys “privy to plans” discussed “their hope to turn the ‘normies’ or ‘normiecons’ loose on January 6 to incite and inspire them to ‘burn that city to ash today’ and ‘smash some pigs to dust.’”

During her questioning, Klobuchar implied that the FBI had no informants among the fascist militia members who laid siege to the Capitol. “There must be moments,” she said, “if only we could have known, if we could have infiltrated this group and found out what they are doing. Do you have those moments?”

This could be nothing other than an attempt at damage control on behalf of the FBI. The notion that the FBI does not have dozens, if not hundreds of informants in groups such as the Proud Boys, Oath Keepers and III Percenters is absurd, given the ease with which these groups are infiltrated by the state.

Indeed, as Klobuchar well knows, the press has reported, citing 2014 court documents, that Proud Boys Chairman Tarrío has himself served as an FBI informant.

The Republicans on the committee continued to put forward the party line, equating the hundreds of thousands of people who protested against police murder over the summer with those who stormed the Capitol on January 6.

This was the tack taken by the ranking Republican on the Judiciary Committee, Chuck Grassley of Iowa, who denounced those who take a “narrow view” of the “extremist threat.” “We can’t just focus on white supremacy,” Grassley declared, demanding that the committee examine “very broadly, all forms of political extremism.” He then alluded to Michael Reinhoehl, an antifascist protester who was assassinated by US Marshals last year on the orders of Trump.

Among the Democrats’ “Republican colleagues” on the panel were co-conspirators in the coup plot, such as Josh Hawley of Missouri and Ted Cruz of Texas, who led the drive in the Senate to block the certification of Biden’s election victory on the basis of the lie of a “stolen election.”



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