

January 20 Inauguration Rife With Threats and Disruptions in Washington, DC, and Other US Cities



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The inauguration of President-elect Joe Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris is scheduled to take place at the US Capitol on Wednesday, January 20 at 12:00 PM EST. The event will involve a significantly smaller crowd than normal due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, with only 1,000 tickets issued to each of the 535 members of Congress and a guest. Regardless, a significant security perimeter will be in place for the Washington, DC, metropolitan area, due in part to the attack on the US Capitol last week by far-right extremists, and protected by some 20,000 National Guard troops and various law enforcement agencies. The zone will also include road closures, public transportation disruptions, and perimeter restrictions throughout much of the downtown DC and Capitol Hill areas. Security of the Inauguration and related events has been placed under higher scrutiny than normal following the violent events at the Capitol last week, as well as reports of potential threats to the January 20 proceedings. Similar threats and warnings of armed protests and other violent actions have been made against all 50 state capitols and have led to increased security at those locations as well. There remains a considerable concern that the January 6 riot has further emboldened extremists who may attempt an even more impactful attack either in DC or elsewhere.

KEY JUDGMENTS

- There is an escalated risk of civil unrest and politically motivated violence around Inauguration Day and the large-scale security response around the White House and Capitol suggests legitimate concern over the possibility of extremists attempting to disrupt the transition of power.
 - Authorities continue to reveal threats against the Inauguration from far-right groups and supporters apparently emboldened by the storming of the US Capitol last week. Many of these actors have called for armed protests in DC and in all 50 states on January 16-17, with some indicating willingness to commit violence in support of their cause.
 - Based on protest history, including anti-lockdown demonstrations and ‘Stop the Steal’ rallies, the prevalence of militias, credible threats reported by law enforcement, and other factors, the RIMC assesses that the following states likely face the greatest risk of unrest surrounding the Inauguration: Arizona, California, Georgia, Michigan, Minnesota, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Washington State, and Wisconsin.
- The de facto fortification of downtown DC will likely cause actors with malign intent to seek out less guarded targets. These could potentially include courthouses and other government buildings in other US capitals and cities, as well as critical infrastructure and/or crowded locations outside the security perimeter in DC and/or other states.
- Tight, extended security measures will disrupt daily life for those who live and work in parts of Washington, DC, especially near the National Mall, and other state capitals.
 - Public access restrictions, road closures, parking rules, and security sweeps will impact pedestrian and vehicular movement, increasing travel times and interrupting the shipping and delivery of materials, parts, and products to area businesses.
- An elevated threat of political violence and unrest by far-right, and to a lesser extent far-left, groups will persist after the Inauguration and remain a leading security concern for the remainder of 2021 and beyond.
 - The storming of the Capitol on January 6, in addition to new threats of armed protests and attacks on government buildings and officials in the week since, indicate that anger over the outcome of the November 2020 election, partisan antipathy, and anti-government sentiments continue to run high, thereby providing right-wing extremists with a perceived motive to act.
 - Left-leaning activists have expressed anger over the storming of the Capitol and have indicated an intent to demonstrate in state capitals this weekend over what they perceive to be an affront to the country’s democratic values. The presence of counter-protesters during previous rallies called in support of President Trump in Washington, DC, and in other US cities has routinely led to clashes, including stabbings, between the rival parties and law enforcement. Given the current politically charged, contentious domestic climate, any counter-protests that occur are more likely to escalate into violence.

- Business assets and operations near protest locations may face threats such as collateral damage, targeted protests or attacks, opportunistic looting, and disruptions or restrictions due to security measures from this weekend through, and possibly after, Inauguration Day.

EVENT DETAILS

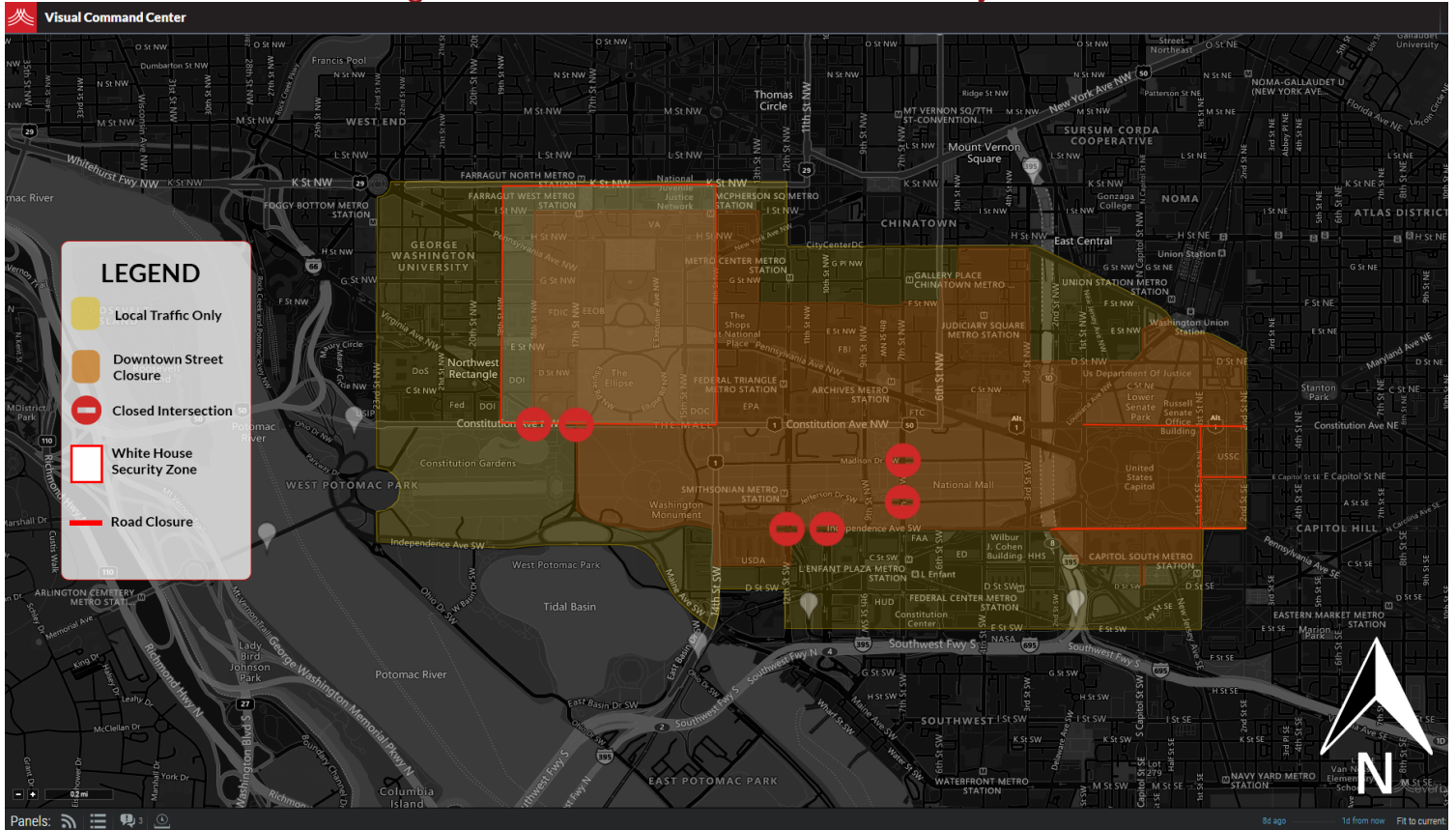
President-elect Joe Biden will be sworn in as 46th President of the United States on Wednesday, January 20 at 12:00 PM local time as prescribed by the 20th Amendment to the US Constitution. The inaugural ceremonies will take place at the US Capitol in Washington, DC, and will be titled, “Our Determined Democracy: Forging a More Perfect Union.” Whereas 200,000 tickets for the event are normally distributed to members of Congress for their constituents, only about 1,000 people will be in attendance this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Likewise, the traditional inaugural parade from the Capitol Grounds to the White House via Pennsylvania Avenue will be pared down as part of coronavirus prevention measures. Instead, President-elect Biden will make an abbreviated, military escorted trek to the White House from 15th Street NW after a “pass in review” of troops from every branch of the military on the East front of the Capitol. There will also be a televised “Virtual Parade Across America” program featuring musical acts, poetry readings, and essential workers. To promote social distancing, other inaugural balls and celebratory events have either been canceled or will be held virtually.

SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS

Presidential inaugurations are typically conducted amid robust security due to the attendance of American and foreign dignitaries, as well as the visibility and significance associated with the event. This was certain to be the case with President-elect Biden’s inauguration next week; however, the storming of the Capitol by far-right supporters of President Trump on January 6 and threats of further violence on and around January 20 have prompted authorities to bolster security arrangements even more. The US Secret Service initiated National Special Security Event (NSSE) operations on Wednesday, January 13, nearly a week earlier than originally planned, which will last through January 21. The agency is leading security preparations at the Capitol and other federal buildings and will be supported by as many as 20,000 National Guardsmen who have been mobilized to help provide security during the Inauguration. Of these, 10,000 National Guard units are expected to arrive in the District by January 16 and will reportedly be armed in order to defend themselves, the Capitol, and surrounding buildings in the wake of the January 6 riot. As many as 4,000 law enforcement officers from across the country will also be on hand to help maintain law and order. The Secret Service has approved a list of prohibited items for the Inauguration, which can be accessed here:

<https://www.secretservice.gov/sites/default/files/reports/2021-01/List-of-Prohibited-Items.pdf>.

Inauguration Road Closures and Security Perimeter



Local Traffic Only and Downtown Street Closure perimeters highlight restrictions for 2017 Inauguration due to the lack of information shared on all imposed restrictions at time of writing. Information will be updated as it becomes available.

Sources: DC Police Department, NBC4 – annotations from Everbridge’s Global Insights Team

ROAD CLOSURES

As part of the mobilization, authorities will establish an Inauguration security perimeter surrounding the White House that will restrict access to parts of downtown DC. The DC Mayor’s office has indicated that the zone will be larger than previous inaugurations, with the boundaries comprising K Street NW to the north, Constitution Avenue NW to the south, 19th Street NW to the west, and 14th Street NW to the east. Fencing and physical barriers will be installed throughout the zone and numerous streets within it will be closed until after the Inauguration on January 20. While some roads and parking areas were reportedly closed early January 12, DC’s Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) and US Capitol Police (USCP) announced that parts of Constitution Avenue NW, Independence Avenue SW, Massachusetts Avenue NW, East Capitol Street, 7th Street SW, and the 12th Street Tunnel northbound, among others, would close to motorists until further notice at 8:00 AM local time on Thursday, January 14.

According to MPD and USCP, the following streets will remain closed until after the Inauguration:

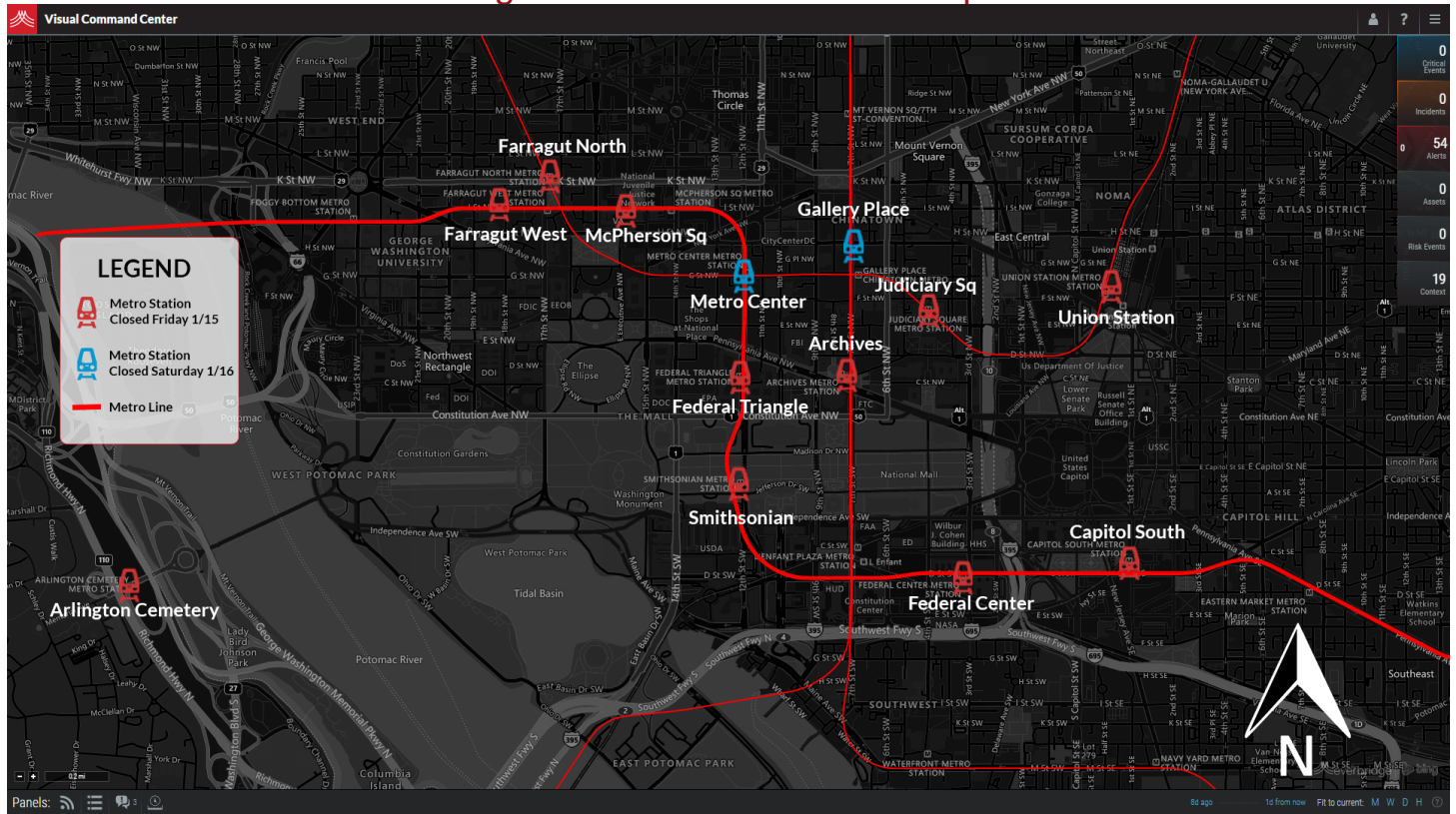
- Constitution Avenue NW between First Street NW and Second Street NE
- Independence Avenue between Washington Avenue SW and Second Street SE
- First Street between Constitution Avenue NE and Independence Avenue SE
- East Capitol Street NE between First Street and Second Street
- 18th Street at Constitution Avenue NW
- 17th Street at Independence Avenue SW
- 11th Street at Independence Avenue SW
- 12th Street at Independence Avenue SW
- 7th Street at Madison Drive NW
- 7th Street at Jefferson Drive SW
- 12th Street Tunnel northbound, between I-395/Southwest Freeway and Constitution Avenue
- I-395/3rd Street Tunnel northbound ramp to D Street NW/US Senate (Exit 9)
- K Street NW both ways between 20th Street and 13th Street
- 14th Street SW both ways between Independence Avenue and K Street NW

All parking garages and loading docks within the security footprint were also to close at 8:00 AM on January 14, with any vehicles not moved to remain in place until after January 20. The rules apply to residential and commercial buildings alike, and all business deliveries are reportedly required to undergo special screening at an off-site facility. Any persons attempting to enter the security perimeter may be asked, and possibly required to provide evidence, of their purpose there. With the potential for reassessments to these and other vehicular restrictions, one should refer to this link for updates: <https://inauguration.dc.gov/page/street-closures>.

Following the Capitol being secured on Wednesday night, Congress resumed certifying the 2020 victory for President-elect Joseph Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris. Shortly after 6:00 PM, Twitter and Facebook temporarily suspended President Trump's accounts after he issued messages on the platforms that failed to condemn the rioters at the Capitol. Facebook has since announced that President Trump's account will remain suspended through at least Inauguration Day, while Twitter allowed Trump to resume posting on Thursday before permanently suspending his account on Friday afternoon due to "the risk of further incitement of violence." On Thursday, the US Capitol Police Chief, the Senate Sergeant at Arms, and the House Sergeant at Arms all resigned in response to the January 6 attack. Since the Wednesday incident, at least nine members of the Trump administration have resigned, including two cabinet members, Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos, and Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao.

In addition to the 6:00 PM curfew in Washington, the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) announced the early closure of Metrorail and Metrobus service beginning at 8:00 PM. Regular service resumed on Thursday morning. Mayor Bowser declared a public emergency, which will stay in effect through at least January 21. In neighboring Virginia, Governor Ralph Northam declared a state of emergency in response to the riots at the Capitol and issued a curfew for Arlington and Alexandria counties for Wednesday night.

Inauguration Public Transit Disruptions



Sources: WMATA – annotations from Everbridge’s Global Insights Team

PUBLIC TRANSIT

WMATA has also announced service adjustments and station closures for Metrorail and Metrobus in compliance with the Inauguration security perimeter.

The following stations will be closed from Friday, January 15:

- Farragut North
- Judiciary Square
- Union Station
- Archives
- Arlington Cemetery
- Farragut West
- McPherson Square
- Federal Center SW
- Capitol South
- Smithsonian
- Federal Triangle

The following Metro stations will be closed from Saturday, January 16:

- Metro Center
- Gallery Place

The affected stations will not reopen until Thursday, January 21, with all trains passing through them without stopping for the duration of the closure. All other Metro line services will run on a Saturday schedule while the stations are closed, with Red Line trains arriving every 12 minutes and the rest arriving every 15 minutes.

With regard to bus service, Metro has said that 26 routes will be diverted around the security perimeter; however, buses between the West Falls Church and Wiehle-Reston East Metrorail stations will not be impacted. Comprehensive details regarding service information can be found here: <https://www.wmata.com/about/news/2021-Inauguration-Service-Adjustments.cfm>.

For its part, Loudoun County Transit has indicated it will only operate “morning and afternoon Commuter Bus Services to and from the West Falls Church Metro Station,” including Routes 281, 282, 481, 482, 681, 682, 881, and 882.

ADDITIONAL ACCESS RESTRICTIONS

In addition to road closures and public transit alterations, authorities have blocked public access to the Capitol Grounds until after the Inauguration, and the National Park Service (NPS) is considering whether to close the National Mall for the occasion as well. A seven-foot-tall, non-scalable fence has been erected around the perimeter of the Capitol after the building was breached by protesters last week. To help prevent a repeat of those events and to protect public property, DC Mayor Muriel Bowser has filed a request for NPS and the Department of the Interior to cancel demonstration permits until January 24.

US Coast Guard Sector Maryland-NCR has established a temporary security zone covering parts of the Potomac and Anacostia rivers, as well as adjacent waters, from 8:00 AM on January 13 through 8:00 AM on Monday, January 25. The zone includes all navigable waters of the Potomac River from the Francis Scott Key Bridge to the DC shoreline at Hains Point, as well as from Hains Point to the Woodrow Wilson Memorial Bridge. The zone also includes all navigable waters of the Anacostia River bounded by the John Philip Sousa (Pennsylvania Avenue) Bridge to the north and Hains Point to the south. During the enforcement time, entry into the zone by all vessels and watercraft is prohibited without authorization from the Coast Guard. The entire Maritime Safety and Security Bulletin can be viewed here: [https://homeport.uscg.mil/Lists/Content/Attachments/65436/MSSB%2001-21%20Change%201%20Security%20Zone%20for%20the%2059th%20Presidential%20Inauguration%20\(Signed\).pdf](https://homeport.uscg.mil/Lists/Content/Attachments/65436/MSSB%2001-21%20Change%201%20Security%20Zone%20for%20the%2059th%20Presidential%20Inauguration%20(Signed).pdf).

Finally, Mayor Bowser, along with the governors of Maryland and Virginia, have issued joint appeals for visitors not to travel to the District for the Inauguration, citing security risks and COVID-19. Likewise, Mayor Bowser has asked individuals to avoid the central business district in downtown DC unless traveling there for essential purposes. To dissuade visitors from arriving, a ban on indoor dining at restaurants has been extended until January 22 and all DC museums must remain closed until 5:00 AM local time on January 24.

Additionally, the Washington Monument has been closed and tours have been halted until January 24. The accommodation rental site Airbnb has also said it is canceling all reservations in the DC area during the Inauguration.

SECURITY THREATS

The Capitol Police reportedly briefed Members of Congress this week on three separate plots that may pose a risk to the Inauguration. These include the aforementioned plans for armed protests in DC and elsewhere in the United States, known online as the “Million Militia March.” An additional protest in Washington, DC, is allegedly being planned for an unspecified date and time to commemorate Ashli Babbitt, who was shot and killed by Capitol Police during last week’s riot. The third plot involves a protest in DC that would allegedly see rioters form an armed perimeter around the Capitol, White House, and Supreme Court before blocking Democrats from entering the Capitol, in order to allow Republicans to take control of the government. Specific details on the threats have been withheld, including dates, times, organizers, and any potential countermeasures that have been taken. Separately, a suspect was arrested in Illinois on January 12 for threatening the lives of President-elect Joe Biden and other Democratic lawmakers during the Inauguration. There have also been several media reports detailing unspecified threats made against Republican lawmakers and a number of Republicans who abstained from voting on impeachment out of fear that they might be attacked for voting yes.

As of this writing, at least seven permits have been issued by NPS for protests occurring during the upcoming inauguration period. The two largest protests both expect around 5,000 participants and have been organized by the DC Action Lab and Black Pact activist groups. The DC Action Lab demonstration is scheduled to begin on Friday, January 15, and includes a variety of locations including Freedom Plaza, the National Mall, Lafayette Park, and the MLK Jr Memorial, among others. The group is expected to protest through Sunday, January 24, and the action is described as a “free speech demonstration against the Inauguration.” The Black Pact gathering is scheduled to begin on Wednesday, January 20, and will include activity in the areas of the MLK Jr Memorial, Independence Avenue SW, and the Lincoln Memorial. The group is expected to protest through Friday, January 22, and the action has been planned to draw awareness to systemic racism, police use of force, and reparations for Black people.

Additional protest activity is likely in Washington, DC, and elsewhere beginning this weekend and lasting through Inauguration Day. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) issued an internal memo on December 29 warning of expected armed protests at all 50 state capitols beginning on Saturday, January 16, and at the US Capitol beginning on Sunday, January 17. This threat is believed to last through at least January 20. Specific details on these potential actions remain scant, at least in part due to significant steps taken by social media companies to ban groups and members promoting violent actions. This has led to those who are likely to participate in such actions to plan them in more private spaces online. The RIMC assesses that the following states likely face the greatest risk of unrest surrounding the Inauguration: Arizona, California, Georgia, Michigan, Minnesota, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Washington State, and Wisconsin. This is based on the motivations and frequency of previous protests in those locations, including ‘Stop the Steal’ rallies and anti-lockdown demonstrations by activists inflamed by perceived infringements of their liberties. Additionally, many of these regions also have a prevalence of militias and have seen credible threats thwarted by law enforcement, among other factors.

ASSESSMENT

The heightened security measures in DC will make it difficult for any large and disruptive gatherings to materialize around Inauguration Day, especially within the security perimeter. In the wake of the Capitol riot, police will likely act quickly to disperse and/or arrest any potential agitators. This in turn will likely cause aspiring demonstrators and attackers to shift their focus to more vulnerable locations. Chief among these are statehouses in US capitals outside of DC, as per the recent FBI warning, but with those facilities now being fortified as well, other less protected government buildings and interests could become attractive targets. These could potentially include courthouses, governors' mansions, and possibly the private residences of other elected officials, the latter of which have been subject to protests and vandalism on multiple occasions in recent weeks. Law enforcement could also be in the crosshairs, as despite far-right actors having generally been supportive of police, online rhetoric and actions witnessed during the Capitol storming suggest growing hostility and that extremists are coming to view law enforcement as an enemy. While the actual intentions of those behind the Inauguration threats remain unclear, if their strategy involves the use of violence against civilians to cause fear or to obtain concessions, other so-called "soft targets" could witness attacks. These could include crowded areas such as shopping malls and transportation hubs, both outside the security perimeter in DC and in cities throughout the country.

The threat of additional violent acts by domestic extremists has been amplified by the January 6 violence at the Capitol and the immediate fallout from that incident. This has been highlighted by the recent internal FBI bulletin warning of the potential for armed protests at all 50 state capitols, as well as new protests and/or attacks in Washington, DC, including against the US Capitol. Additional chatter on various social media platforms has indicated at the very least that such extremists may be planning further acts of violence, though the veracity of the plans remains hard to judge. Social media platforms have clamped down on content and the posting ability of those members deemed to be discussing violent acts, prompting those who may participate in such actions to migrate to encrypted messaging apps and other harder-to-track corners of the Internet. Regardless, the likelihood of those associated with far-right extremist groups, including the Proud Boys, Oath Keepers, Three Percenters, and the QAnon conspiracy movement, partaking in new violent actions has increased following the Capitol attack last week.

Currently, it remains challenging to forecast whether the various warnings relative to threats of violence and unrest around the Inauguration will materialize. Although the increasing volume of threats over the past week, along with their seemingly more aggressive messaging relative to past periods, suggests a heightened interest in and possible planning of violence, the groups and individuals responsible for them may not have the true intent, motivation, opportunity, and/or capability to ultimately execute such attacks. Some government and security officials have also noted that a significant portion of the internet chatter has been deemed non-credible and that far-right groups do not appear to have conducted the same levels of logistical planning as they did prior to the Capitol breach. However, the scope and scale of the security response indicates legitimate concern amongst authorities over the potential for violence and unrest around the Inauguration.

Additionally, with the storming of the Capitol likely to have emboldened far-right extremists and January 20 presumably representing a final opportunity to block the formal transition of power, nefarious actors could be increasingly motivated to take overt action.

Therefore, the risk of isolated, and perhaps coordinated, security incidents ahead of and on Inauguration Day must be taken seriously. Based upon initial information gathered and lessons learned by hostile elements involved in the storming of the Capitol, in addition to recent social media threats, potential tactics or actions could include, but are not limited to, violent protests, rioting, shootings, and crude bombings. The use of motor vehicles as weapons also presents a risk at any protests or counter-protests that may occur.

On January 12, the Joint Chiefs of Staff issued a memo reminding service members that President-elect Biden would be inaugurated on January 20 and that service members must support and defend the Constitution, while acts disrupting the transition of power are against the traditions, values, and oaths of the military, as well as being criminal offenses. The statement came as the US Army announced it was working with the Secret Service to conduct additional background screening for service members who will work in support of the Inauguration amid reports that at least 26 law enforcement officers in 11 states are under investigation for participating in last week's Capitol riot. The Department of Defense (DOD) is investigating several active-duty members who allegedly participated in the actions at the Capitol as well. Although a remote possibility, the allegations of a potential conflict of duty among some members of law enforcement and DOD personnel could raise the specter of complicity in subversive acts.

Businesses and retail establishments could also be affected by unrest and violence associated with the Inauguration, especially those situated near state capitol complexes and other government buildings. Indeed, there does not appear to have been an intent to directly target businesses in incidents of looting, vandalism, and arson during previous rallies in support of President Trump as there was amid the protests against police use of force over the summer; however, such locations could suffer collateral damage if violence breaks out during any of the planned far-right gatherings. Businesses could also be targeted by looters, protesters, and both far-right and far-left actors if they are perceived as having a bias for or against President Trump or other political affiliations. Offices, data centers, and retail establishments belonging to technology companies could also be susceptible in this regard, notably Amazon, Apple, Facebook, Google, Twitter, and YouTube, all of which have recently suspended President Trump or removed Parler and other right-wing social media apps from their platforms. Opportunists could also exploit any chaos or unrest in a given area to loot local stores. Still, the obstacle that most businesses are likely to be impacted by in the lead-up to Inauguration Day is heightened security measures adopted by local authorities to prevent untoward incidents and associated disruptions. These could include night-time curfews and road closures near government buildings and other sensitive locations, both of which could limit hours of operation and access to facilities by employees and patrons. Best practices to mitigate potential risks to store associates, products, and operations include formulating contingency plans that include guidance and procedures for minimizing personnel on-site, altering hours of operations, and fortifying buildings and other assets.

In light of the various threats surrounding the Inauguration, individuals should monitor local news outlets to stay apprised of ongoing security developments and heed the guidance of authorities in the coming days. Additionally, DC's deputy mayor has advised individuals to allow additional time for any travel between the White House and Capitol building due to road closures and security checks. These measures will also disrupt last-mile deliveries in the District and other city centers. As such, businesses should modify delivery schedules to ensure that materials, parts, and products are received on time.

Air travelers should likewise allow additional time for screening and anticipate a more visible security presence at airports, while some airlines have temporarily prohibited checked firearms and/or suspended alcohol sales on flights to DC. Meanwhile, regardless of security protocols, protests in DC and elsewhere remain highly likely. Any demonstrations that materialize should be avoided due to the potential for escalation and/or incidental violence. The public is advised to maintain vigilance while in public locations, particularly near state legislative buildings, and to report any suspicious or atypical items or behavior to local authorities.

The threat of politically motivated unrest and violence will endure beyond the Inauguration on January 20. The storming of the Capitol on January 6 and new threats of armed protests and attacks on government buildings and officials in the week since, indicate that anger over the outcome of the November 2020 election, partisan antipathy, and anti-government sentiments remain high. Additionally, the grievances and misgivings held by extremists and even some more mainstream individuals are not confined simply to the election result, but rather to a perceived affront to their rights and values. With a Biden presidency seen as a further threat to their beliefs and customs, these individuals will remain motivated to act. Moderate elements will likely continue to organize demonstrations, while more hardline and extremist factions could resort to violence, potentially including against political figures they allege to be responsible for the perceived infringements. Counter-protests by left-leaning activists also represent a threat in this regard, as the presence of these individuals at previous demonstrations in support of President Trump, both in DC and in other US states, has routinely led to clashes between the rival parties, including multiple stabbings. Following the Capitol breach, there have been calls online to organize demonstrations in state capitals this weekend to coincide with the gatherings planned by far-right groups. The presence of potentially armed individuals, coupled with the acrimonious domestic political climate, makes for a combustible mix in which violence between opposing demonstrators is highly likely. Disruptive protests staged by left-wing actors over issues unrelated to the Biden presidency also remain a concern, albeit a more distant one. These include developments relating to police use of force and perceived racial inequity, which, if attended by participants with violent intent, could devolve into rioting, looting, and arson, similar to last summer. Such demonstrations could also potentially be co-opted by members and supporters of anti-fascist (antifa) and anarchist groups seeking to foment chaos through violence and other crimes.