Dear Troublemaker,

During a year bookended by a violent attempted insurrection and an ominous new COVID variant, Defending Rights and Dissent forged ahead with renewed efforts opposing surveillance, fighting racial profiling, and protecting whistleblowers.

DRAD advanced our mission in numerous concrete ways – several among our many accomplishments are highlighted in this report, including:

- Hosting Grassroots Capitol Hill Advocacy Day, bringing members of impacted communities to DC (virtually) to lobby against mass surveillance and racial profiling.
- Bringing together Noam Chomsky, Marianne Williamson, Rep. Ron Paul, and many other high profile individuals on our open letter to President Biden to end the War on Terror at home.
- Building support in Congress and across the general public for Daniel Hale, the courageous drone whistleblower now serving 45 months in prison for truth-telling about the realities of drone warfare.
- Assisting Congresswoman Cori Bush with the drafting of Protester Bill of Rights legislation.
- Working with Rep. Rashida Tlaib to introduce a bill we drafted, the Protect Brave Whistleblowers Act, as an amendment to the Protecting Our Democracy Act.

Your support and engagement made all of these achievements possible, and we hope you’ll continue to support these essential interventions into 2022.

Together, we’re working to ensure that the promise of the Bill of Rights is a reality.

Stay Loud, Stay Strong,

Sascha Meinrath
Board President

Susan Udry
Executive Director
Twenty years ago, the passage of the USA PATRIOT Act ignited a national grassroots movement led by the Bill of Rights Defense Committee (our previous name).

The idea for a community-based “Bill of Rights Defense Committee” was born at a Women’s Congress for Peace gathering in Northampton, Massachusetts. Within a month, the newly formed Bill of Rights Defense Committee held a community forum and petition drive that culminated with passage of a municipal resolution on May 2, 2002 establishing Northampton as a “civil liberties safe zone.” The idea caught fire and BORDC helped over 400 towns, cities, and even a few states pass similar resolutions over the next few years. Each week Bernie Sanders, then a member of the House of Representatives, would call the nascent BORDC for the latest towns to have passed a resolution so that he could ask their representatives to sponsor his Freedom to Read Protection Act.

On November 9, we gathered online to celebrate the activists who launched BORDC, and who continue to build the movement to defend our rights. Senator Russ Feingold (the lone vote in the Senate against the PATRIOT Act) kicked off the event, followed by the screening of a new mini-documentary that tells the story of the Bill of Rights Defense Committee, and finishing with a conversation between the three dedicated activists who have led the organization over the years.
Defending Rights & Dissent is a leader in the fight to reform the Espionage Act, and raising public awareness about the dangers of using it to prosecute whistleblowers. This year, we mobilized grassroots and civil society support for Daniel Hale, the courageous drone whistleblower now serving 45 months in prison for telling the truth about U.S. drone warfare. Our in-house experts were asked to submit testimonials to the judge on behalf of Hale, critiquing the use of the Espionage Act to prosecute him. Our campaign against the prosecution of Julian Assange was also a major component of our work.

We understand that advocacy for individual whistleblowers is not a substitute for systemic reform. That’s why we worked with Rep. Rashida Tlaib’s office to craft an amendment to the Protecting our Democracy Act that would have reformed the Espionage Act. Unfortunately, it was not allowed to the floor for a vote this year, but we are building momentum to secure permanent and meaningful reforms.

“The most important press freedom case of the century”

At a DRAD online forum on the Julian Assange extradition hearing in October, Intercept Washington Bureau Chief, Ryan Grim, proclaimed it the most important press freedom case of the century. Unfortunately, the mainstream media has virtually ignored it.

Defending Rights & Dissent has stepped into that void, providing breaking news coverage and leading advocacy efforts to support Assange and the right of publishers to publish information in the public interest.

Over the course of the year, we hosted or participated in five online and in-person events about the Assange case where we provided updates, context, analysis, and opportunities to take action.

DRAD Policy Director, Chip Gibbons was a guest commentator about the case on
outlets including the BBC, Counterspin, and various podcasts and radio shows. He also wrote extensively about the case for Jacobin, as he was one of just a handful of American journalists credentialed by the UK High Court to cover the proceedings.

Our advocacy efforts included engaging our grassroots network, educating Congress, and organizing civil society letters highlighting the devastating impact this prosecution will have on press freedom.

**Bringing the Voices of Resistance to the People**

On the 50th anniversary of the publication of the Pentagon Papers in June, we launched the *Primary Sources Podcast*, which celebrates truth telling as an act of resistance and explores the problems of whistleblowers indicted under the Espionage Act. Guests have included Daniel Ellsberg, James Goodale, Thomas Drake, John Kiriakou, and Jeffrey Sterling.

In September, after a drone strike in Kabul was exposed as killing only civilians, we brought you the voices the media ignored: veterans of the military, CIA, and NSA drone programs who spoke the truth: this egregious human rights catastrophe was a common occurrence in the drone program.
Our campaign to Investigate the FBI continued full throttle in 2021.

We finished up our limited series podcast on FBI political surveillance, *The Still Spying Podcast*, early in 2021. The three final episodes included a look at our own organization’s history as a target of FBI spying.

We hosted a grassroots congressional advocacy day, Safety Not Surveillance, to bring the concerns of activists from around the country about FBI spying on racial justice movements.

We provided resources and tools to congressional staff to help them understand internal FBI protocols and classifications in order to enable more effective oversight.

In June, DRAD submitted testimony to the House Oversight Committee regarding concerns about the wrongful targeting of Chinese-American academics and scientists as part of the FBI-led “China Initiative,” among other activities calling for accountability and an end to that program.

**Spotlight on Historic FBI Crimes Ignites Congressional Interest**

The release of the movie *Judas and the Black Messiah* and new revelations about Hoover’s role in the murder of Fred Hampton generated public interest -- and interest in Congress -- about FBI harassment of the Black Panther Party and COINTELPRO in general.

As leading experts in the field, DRAD became an essential resource for members of Congress in their quest for full disclosure of historic FBI crimes and abuses.
It was during a Defending Rights & Dissent event that Fred Hampton’s attorneys, Flint Taylor and Jeffrey Hass, broke the news that Rep. Bobby Rush (D-IL) would ask the Attorney General to release all the FBI files pertaining to the assassination.

DRAD coordinated with Rush’s office to build support for his demand, recruiting members of Congress, civil society organizations, and over 200 historians, journalists and researchers to support his call.

Rush later expanded his demand for FBI transparency, introducing the COINTELPRO Full Disclosure Act, which immediately became a legislative priority for DRAD. DRAD assembled a delegation of historians, journalists, and other experts in FBI abuses, and brought them to Capitol Hill (virtually due to COVID) to stress the importance of opening the FBI’s files.

This year also marked the 50th anniversary of the break-in of the FBI’s Media, Pennsylvania field office, which exposed COINTELPRO and other FBI political harassment campaigns. To mark the occasion, DRAD hosted an online event featuring two of the peace activists-turned-burglars who broke into the office, as well as the Washington Post journalist who broke the story, Betty Medsger, and other experts.
In March we celebrated the one year anniversary of the sunset of Section 215 of the USA PATRIOT Act. It’s a major victory, but the surveillance state rolls on, with advances in technology making mass surveillance and monitoring easier and less expensive (and easier to conceal from the public and Congress) every day.

Our top legislative priority to put the brakes on the surveillance state this year has been the Fourth Amendment is Not for Sale Act, which would prohibit the federal government from buying personal data that would otherwise require a warrant.

Although not brought to the floor for a vote this year, the bill is gaining sponsors and momentum, and will continue to be a priority for us in 2022.

In response to the violence on January 6 and other right wing violence, policy makers are dusting off discredited radicalization theories and pre-crime programs that have historically targeted dissenters, Muslims and other communities of color.

On January 22, DRAD hosted a discussion about the dangers of overreaction and repression in response to January 6, Civil Liberties after the Insurrection, with Intercept reporter, Alice Speri; independent journalist, Arun Gupta; Senior Manager at The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, Iman Boukadoum; and Brennan Center Fellow, Mike German.

In April, DRAD hosted the Safety Not Surveillance Grassroots Advocacy Day, bringing two dozen grassroots activists to meet with two dozen congressional offices to discuss our opposition to these programs. Our message: in the hands of law enforcement and intelligence agencies, dissenters and people of color will
inevitably be the primary targets of any new programs or laws, even if they are intended to.

In June, the Biden Administration announced a new strategy on countering domestic terrorism. Our analysis of the strategy notes that it not only depends on tactics re-heated from the war on international terrorism that cause huge civil liberties concerns, but it also engages in disturbing “both-sideserism” raising up concerns about so-called anarchist extremists, or people motivated by grievances about the environment or animal rights. The strategy leans particularly heavily on the debunked Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) program -- although under a new name.

In response, DRAD launched the **New Name, Same Flaws** project to provide vital perspectives from policy experts and grassroots activists to explain why the Biden strategy will adversely impact dissidents and Black and Brown communities. The first stage of the project is a bi-weekly series of short conversations that are live-streamed on various platforms.

**Protecting Protest Rights**

The backlash against the George Floyd protests of 2020 led to the introduction of over 100 anti-protest bills in states across the country this year. DRAD’s grassroots supporters took action against many of these bills, and we supported statewide coalitions in Minnesota, Ohio, and Florida.

We helped Rep. Cori Bush (D-MO) write national “Protester Bill of Rights” legislation in an effort to de-fang some of the worst state efforts to criminalize peaceful protest.

DRAD grassroots activists took action to end the 1033 program, which allows state and local police to receive - free of charge - decommissioned military gear like armoured vehicles and rifles, which they use to patrol our streets.
As the nation marked the 20th anniversary of the September 11 attacks and the ensuing two decades of the War on Terror, DRAD continued our work to end the war on terror at home.

We have relentlessly campaigned to close Guantanamo prison camp and to seek justice for the men who have been imprisoned there, organizing annual vigils, meeting with members of Congress and the administration to advocate for justice.

In July DRAD organized to protest the conditions of former Guantanamo detainees held in al-Razeen prison in the UAE (and the plan to forcibly repatriate one prisoner to Russia). A week after the protest, the UAE did release six men from al-Razeen to their home country of Yemen.

In September, we brought together Noam Chomsky, Marianne Williamson, Rep. Ron Paul, and many other high profile individuals on our open letter to President Biden to end the War on Terror at home. We also hosted an online panel discussion featuring a surprise appearance by Dr. Sami Al-Arian, and co-sponsored a national convening of primarily Muslim-led grassroots organizations to develop a campaign to end the War on Terror at Home.

In November, we teamed up with Justice for Muslims Collective to host a 3-day film festival showing documentaries and original short films, Shattered Justice, Shattered Lives: Counternarrating the War on Terror Through Muslim Eyes.
Online Productions

ASSANGE EXtradITION: REACTIONS & ANALYSIS

#ASSANGEEXtradition

Interviews & Panel Discussions

- January 4: Julian Assange Extradition Live Reaction
- January 7: Assange Extradition Blocked: So What’s Next? with Kevin Gosztola
- January 22: Civil Liberties after the Insurrection with Alice Speri, Arun Gupta, Iman Boukadoum, Mike German
- January 26: Fred Hampton The Fight for Truth with attorneys Jeffrey Haas and Flint Taylor
- March 8: Break In: 50 Years After the Event That Exposed COINTELPRO with Betty Medsger, Paul Coates, Mike German, Johanna Hamilton, and 3 of the burglars.
- April 6: Standing with Daniel Hale, Standing with Whistleblowers with Jesslyn Raddack, Thomas Drake, and Jeffrey Sterling
- April 22: The FBI, Judas, and the Black Messiah with Aaron J. Leonard and Connor A. Gallagher
- September 21: Ending the War on Terror at Home with Majorie Cohn, Kevin Gosztola, Ashik Siddique, and Dr. Sami Al-Arian
- September 30: The Kabul Strike: Drone Whistleblowers React with Lisa Ling, Cian Westmoreland, Keagan Miller & Christopher Aaron
- October 28: Reactions & Analysis of the Julian Assange Extradition Appeal with Ryan Grim, Stefania Maurizi, Chip Gibbons, and Kevin Gosztola
- November 9: Outrage to Action: Reflections on 20 Years of the Bill of Rights Defense Committee
This summertime series of weekly, short online events was launched just a couple weeks after the Biden Administration published their National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism. The series features academics, grassroots activists, and policy experts analyzing the Biden Administration’s approach.

What is CVE/CP3?
The ‘Path to Violence’ Myth

Muslim Activists
Call BS on Biden

Fighting the Stalker State

The War on Terror’s Education Division

Criminalizing Disability

Are You An Anarchist Extremist?!

As you know, the FBI uses political speech and points of view to define domestic terrorism threats. It states that adopting radical ideas is the first step to becoming a terrorist. The FBI has a huge problem distinguishing speech from terrorism, so using definitions of terrorism that so heavily rely on First Amendment protected points of view only sends the message that certain types of speech are indicators of terrorism and thus require scrutiny.

In this popular explainer video, our policy director Chip Gibbons explains why the FBI’s definition of “anarchist extremism” is completely wrong.
Host Chip Gibbons interviews whistleblowers and other truth-tellers who exposed civil liberties and human rights abuses committed under the guise of national security and the attempts to silence them. Launched on the 50th anniversary of the Pentagon Papers, our first episode featured an interview with Dan Ellsberg.

Episodes are released every two weeks, and many include a video version to reach a broader audience.

Listen to the podcast at primarysourcespodcast.org or any major audio streamer (Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon Music, etc.)