



Written Statement for House Committee on Homeland Security

Global Terrorism: Threats to the Homeland

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10 September 2019

Testimony to be presented before the House Committee on Homeland Security on Tuesday, September 10, 2019.



About The Soufan Center

The Soufan Center (TSC) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to serving as a resource and forum for research, analysis, and strategic dialogue related to global security issues and emergent threats. TSC fills a niche-role by producing independent, quality research and hosting proactive conversations in order to effectively equip thought leaders, policy makers, governments, bi- and multilateral institutions, media, and those in the non-profit and academic communities to engage in strategic security-related practices. Our work focuses on a broad range of complex security issues— from international and domestic terrorism, to humanitarian crisis analysis, to refugee and immigrant issues, and more.

The Soufan Center is a 501c3 non-profit organization.

About Ali Soufan

Ali Soufan is the Founder of The Soufan Center. Mr. Soufan is a former FBI Supervisory Special Agent who investigated and supervised highly sensitive and complex international terrorism cases, including the East Africa Embassy Bombings, the attack on the USS Cole, and the events surrounding 9/11. He is the Chief Executive Officer of The Soufan Group and Founder of The Soufan Center.



Threats to the Homeland: A Complex Terrorism Landscape

Testimony of Mr. Ali Soufan,
Founder of The Soufan Center

Before the House Committee on Homeland Security
United States House of Representatives

Tuesday, September 10, 2019

INTRODUCTION

Chairman Thompson, Ranking Member Rogers, distinguished members: Thank you for hearing my testimony today.

During this session on global terrorism and threats to the homeland, my aim is to provide a brief overview of the threat landscape while focusing in particular on the challenges facing the United States in protecting the homeland from terrorist attacks. We are reminded of the importance of remaining vigilant, particularly given tomorrow's somber eighteen-year anniversary of the al-Qaeda attacks on the U.S. on September 11, 2001. But even after untold trillions of dollars¹ spent and thousands of lives lost in the name of counter-terrorism, the threat landscape is arguably more complex today than it was nearly two decades ago. The threat from al-Qaeda and other Salafi-jihadist groups like the so-called Islamic State remain, joined by the challenges posed by Violent White Supremacist Extremism (WSE), an ideology with a foothold in the U.S. and with tentacles stretching across the globe, from Ukraine to New Zealand and beyond.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony.

In my years of tracking, analyzing, and ultimately trying to disrupt terrorist organizations, I draw four main conclusions about the current state of global terrorism and threats to the U.S. homeland. **First**, both al-Qaeda and the Islamic State remain a threat to the United States homeland, even as both organizations look different than they did just a year ago at this same time, given important geopolitical developments. **Second**, in addition to the challenges posed by combating Salafi-jihadist organizations, there is a clear and present threat posed by violent white supremacy extremism (WSE) and violent white supremacy. **Third**, there are important similarities between Salafi-jihadist organizations and violent white supremacist extremists, especially in areas such as the use of violence,

¹ No official number exists for the combined cost of the "Global War on Terror," but estimates range between \$3 trillion and \$6 trillion (National Defense Budget Estimates for FY 2019; the Costs of War project at Brown University's Watson Institute of International and Public Affairs).



operating on the Internet, recruitment, propaganda, financing, and the transnational nature of the networks. **Fourth**, the U.S. government is at a disadvantage, largely due to the lack of comprehensive legislation and available tools, when it comes to combating the threat posed by violent white supremacist extremists, but there are still important lessons that can be gleaned from studying the fight against al-Qaeda and the Islamic State.

THE CURRENT STATE OF GLOBAL JIHAD

Months after the collapse of the territorial caliphate in Iraq and Syria, the Islamic State remains a viable threat to the United States and the international community writ large. The organization's leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi is alive and on the lam, while in the group's former strongholds, it is reconstituting its networks and waging a low-level campaign of political assassinations, ambushes, and guerilla warfare-style attacks.² IS will be able to continue making money, even without a stranglehold on territory, and still has access to hundreds of millions of dollars that will aid its efforts to rebuild its organization.³ A United Nations report recently warned that IS "could launch international terrorist attacks before the end of the year" in Europe.⁴ The United States remains vulnerable from homegrown violent extremists inspired by Islamic State propaganda, reinforced in the eyes of would-be jihadists by the daily images coming from detention camps like al-Hol, in Syria.⁵ Over the past several months, there have been several arrests of American citizens seeking to plan attacks on U.S. soil on behalf of the Islamic State.⁶

Al-Qaeda, for its part, also seems determined to strike the United States. In a message from April 2017, Zawahiri reiterated the importance of al-Qaeda's global struggle.⁷ The next month, messages from both Osama bin Laden's son Hamza (now allegedly deceased) and AQAP emir Qassim al-

² Eric Schmitt, Alissa J. Rubin, and Thomas Gibbons-Neff. "ISIS Is Regaining Strength in Iraq and Syria." *The New York Times*, August 19, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/19/us/politics/isis-iraq-syria.html>; Louisa Loveluck and Mustafa Salim. "Hundreds of Islamic State Militants Are Slipping Back into Iraq. Their Fight Isn't over." *Washington Post*, July 21, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/hundreds-of-islamic-state-militants-are-slipping-back-into-iraq-their-fight-isnt-over/2019/07/21/1f1be4262-a259-11e9-a767-d7ab84aef3e9_story.html

³ Patrick Johnston, Mona Alami, Colin P. Clarke, and Howard J. Shatz. "Return and Expand? The Finances and Prospects of the Islamic State After the Caliphate." RAND Corporation, 2019, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR3046.html

⁴ Nick Cumming-Bruce, "ISIS, Eyeing Europe, Could Launch Attacks This Year, U.N. Warns." *The New York Times*, August 3, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/03/world/middleeast/islamic-state-attacks-europe.html>

⁵ Bethan McKernan, "Inside Al-Hawl Camp, the Incubator for Islamic State's Resurgence." *The Guardian*, August 31, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/aug/31/inside-al-hawl-camp-the-incubator-for-islamic-states-resurgence>; Vivian Yee, "Guns, Filth and ISIS: Syrian Camp Is 'Disaster in the Making.'" *The New York Times*, September 3, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/03/world/middleeast/isis-alhol-camp-syria.html>; Loveluck, Louisa, and Souad Mekhennet. "At a Sprawling Tent Camp in Syria, ISIS Women Impose a Brutal Rule." *Washington Post*, September 3, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/at-a-sprawling-tent-camp-in-syria-isis-women-impose-a-brutal-rule/2019/09/03/3fcd14-c4ea-11e9-8bf7-cde2d9e09055_story.html

⁶ Madeleine Carlisle, "19-Year-Old Queens Man Arrested for Intending to Commit an Attack on Behalf of ISIS." *Time*, August 30, 2019, <https://time.com/5665735/queens-teen-isis-attack/>; Michael Kunzelman, "Man Indicted on Terror Charge in Alleged ISIS-Inspired Plot." *NBC4 Washington*, August 29, 2019, <http://www.nbcwashington.com/news/local/Maryland-Man-Indicted-on-Terror-Charge-in-Alleged-ISIS-Inspired-Plot-558764191.html>

⁷ Charles Lister, "How al-Qa'ida Lost Control of Its Syrian Affiliate," *CTC Sentinel*, Vol.11, Iss.12, February 2018, p.6, <https://ctc.usma.edu/al-qaida-lost-control-syrian-affiliate-inside-story/>



Raimi both released videos urging al-Qaeda's followers to launch attacks in the West.⁸ Yet another speech from Zawahiri, this one titled "America is the First Enemy of the Muslims" and released in March 2018, incited al-Qaeda's followers to strike the U.S.⁹ A recent United Nations assessment of al-Qaeda's links to groups in Syria observed the following in reference to Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and Tanzim Huras al-Din (HAD): "HTS and HAD are assessed to share a history and an ideology but to differ on policy. HTS centered its agenda on [Syria], with no interest in conducting attacks abroad. HAD, by contrast, was said to have a more international outlook."¹⁰ None of this should be surprising, as al-Qaeda's overarching narrative has always been that the West is at war with Islam.¹¹

THE RISING THREAT OF VIOLENT WHITE SUPREMACIST EXTREMISM

But it is not only jihadi terrorism that threatens the U.S. homeland. As the Anti-Defamation League reports, in 2018 violent white supremacist extremists were responsible for three times as many deaths in the United States as were Islamists.¹² Moreover, in May of this year, a senior F.B.I. official testified to Congress that the bureau is pursuing about 850 domestic terrorism investigations, a "significant majority" of which are related to white supremacist extremists.¹³ Out of necessity, U.S. law enforcement and intelligence agencies are well aware of the threat posed to the U.S. homeland from domestic terrorism. From Pittsburgh to Poway and El Paso to Charlottesville, violent white supremacist extremism plagues the United States on a regular basis, but this threat is not just local in nature.

The attacks in Norway and New Zealand invited closer scrutiny on WSE, and revealed that similar to the global jihadist movement, violent white supremacists and other elements of the radical ideology maintain international linkages and continue to forge global networks with ideologues¹⁴ radicalizing individuals across the globe. Both Breivik and Tarrant drew inspiration from grievances from other countries and causes, while each presented himself as a defender of global

⁸ Aaron Y. Zelin, "Introduction," in Aaron Y. Zelin, ed., *How al-Qaeda Survived Drones, Uprisings, and the Islamic State: The Nature of the Current Threat*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Focus 153, June 2017, p.6, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/how-al-qaeda-survived-drones-uprisings-and-the-islamic-state>

⁹ Tore Refslund Hamming and Pieter Van Ostaeen, "The True Story of al-Qaeda's Demise and Resurgence in Syria," *Lawfare*, April 8, 2018, <https://www.lawfareblog.com/true-story-al-qaedas-demise-and-resurgence-syria>; see also, Thomas Joscelyn, "Al Qaeda Chief Says America is the 'First Enemy' of Muslims," *Long War Journal*, March 21, 2018, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2018/03/al-qaeda-chief-says-america-is-the-first-enemy-of-muslims.php>

¹⁰ Letter dated 15 July 2019 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council. <https://undocs.org/S/2019/570>

¹¹ Colin P. Clarke and Charles Lister, "Al-Qaeda is Ready to Attack You Again," *Foreign Policy*, September 4, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/09/04/al-qaeda-is-ready-to-attack-you-again/>

¹² "Murder and Extremism in the United States in 2018," Anti-Defamation League, <https://www.adl.org/murder-and-extremism-2018>

¹³ David Shortell, "FBI is Investigating More than 850 Domestic Terrorism Cases," *CNN.com*, May 8, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/05/08/politics/fbi-domestic-terrorism-cases/index.html>

¹⁴ Some prominent ideologues in the WSE movement include: James Mason, Greg Johnson, Martin Lichtmesz, Frodi Midjord, and Kevin MacDonald, among others.



European white civilization.¹⁵ And while the attacks at Utoya and Christchurch are among the most prominent of those perpetrated by WSEs, there have also been linkages between WSE ideologies and attacks in the United States (California, Florida, Kansas, New Mexico, Oregon, South Carolina, Wisconsin) Canada, Germany, the U.K., and Sweden.¹⁶

Yet the emerging epicenter of WSE seems to be located in Russia and Ukraine. There are extensive ties between the Russian government and far-right groups in Europe.¹⁷ Russian disinformation efforts online have fueled anti-immigrant sentiment in countries like Sweden, fueling resentment among native-born Swedes and newly arrived immigrants from the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia. In 2015, Sweden accepted 163,000 asylum seekers, primarily from Afghanistan, Somalia, and Syria.¹⁸

In Ukraine, the aforementioned Azov Battalion has actively recruited foreign fighters motivated by white supremacy and neo-Nazi beliefs, including many from the West, to join its ranks and receive training, indoctrination, and instruction in irregular warfare.¹⁹ The group has cultivated a relationship with members of the Atomwaffen Division²⁰ as well as with U.S.-based militants from the Rise Above Movement²¹, or RAM, which the F.B.I. has labeled a “white supremacy extremist group” based in Southern California. The Azov Battalion also maintains a political wing, offering ideological education, and ties to a growing vigilante street movement which can be counted on for violence, intimidation, and coercion.²² On the other side of the conflict in Ukraine, Russian groups

¹⁵ Daniel Byman, “Right-Wingers Are America’s Deadliest Terrorists,” *Slate*, August 5, 2019, <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2019/08/right-wing-terrorist-killings-government-focus-jihadis-islamic-radicalism.html>; see also, Daniel Byman, “Right-Wing Terrorism Has Gone Global,” *Slate*, March 15, 2019, <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2019/03/new-zealand-mosque-attacks-global-right-wing-terrorism.html>

¹⁶ Weiyi Cai and Simone Landon, “Attacks by White Extremists are Growing. So Are Their Connections,” *New York Times*, April 3, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/04/03/world/white-extremist-terrorism-christchurch.html>

¹⁷ Robert Levinson, “The Fight in the Right: It is Time to Tackle White Supremacist Terrorism Globally,” *War on the Rocks*, August 22, 2019, <https://warontherocks.com/2019/08/the-fight-in-the-right-it-is-time-to-tackle-white-supremacist-terrorism-globally/>

¹⁸ Jo Becker, “The Global Machine Behind the Rise of Far-Right Nationalism,” *New York Times*, August 10, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/10/world/europe/sweden-immigration-nationalism.html?rref=collection%2Fbyline%2Fjo-becker&action=click&contentCollection=undefined®ion=stream&module=stream_unit&version=latest&contentPlacement=1&pgtype=collection

¹⁹ “IntelBrief: The Transnational Network That Nobody is Talking About.” *Soufan Center* 22 March 2019, <https://thesoufancenter.org/intelbrief-the-transnational-network-that-nobody-is-talking-about/>; Oren Dorell, “Volunteer Ukrainian Unit Includes Nazis,” *USA Today*, March 10, 2015, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2015/03/10/ukraine-azov-brigade-nazis-abuses-separatists/24664937/>

²⁰ Oleksiy Kuzmenko, “‘Defend the White Race’: American Extremists Being Co-opted by Ukraine’s Far-Right,” *Bellingcat*, February 15, 2019, <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2019/02/15/defend-the-white-race-american-extremists-being-co-opted-by-ukraines-far-right/>

²¹ Criminal Complaint, United States of America v. Robert Paul Rundo, Robert Boman, Tyler Laube, and Aaron Eason, United States District Court, Central District of California, <https://int.nyt.com/data/documenthelper/421-robert-rundo-complaint/0f1e76cdeef814133f24/optimized/full.pdf>

²² Tim Hume, “Far-Right Extremists Have Been Using Ukraine’s War as a Training Ground. They’re Returning Home,” *Vice News*, July 31, 2019, https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/vb95ma/far-right-extremists-have-been-using-ukraines-civil-war-as-a-training-ground-theyre-returning-home



like the Russian Imperial Movement and its paramilitary unit, the Imperial Legion volunteer unit, also attract and train foreign fighters motivated by white supremacy and neo-Nazi beliefs.²³ Just as jihadists have used conflicts in Afghanistan, Chechnya, the Balkans, Iraq, and Syria to swap tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) and solidify transnational networks, so too are WSEs using Ukraine as a hub or battlefield laboratory, where an estimated 17,000 people from over fifty countries has traveled to actively participate in the ongoing conflict.²⁴

COMPARING JIHADISTS & WHITE SUPREMACIST EXTREMISTS

Although the threat of WSE violence has been omnipresent, as outlined in earlier sections discussing the history and evolution of the movement, the lion's share of studies and analysis has focused on jihadi violence. The impact of the al-Qaeda attacks of September 11, 2001 was so significant that for the past two decades, al-Qaeda and now the Islamic State garner far more media attention than terrorist groups not motivated by Salafi jihadism.²⁵ And while there are obviously important differences between jihadis and white supremacist extremists, there are also important similarities that can help inform best practices and lessons learned in how these organizations can be successfully countered. Writing in the *New York Times*, Max Fisher recently observed, "The ideological tracts, recruiting pitches and radicalization tales of the Islamic State during its rise echo, almost word-for-word, those of the white nationalist terrorists of today."²⁶ John R. Allen and Brett McGurk agree, assessing that while WSE attacks "may differ from Islamic State attacks in degree," they are also "similar in kind: driven by hateful narratives, dehumanization, the rationalization of violence and the glorification of murder, combined with ready access to recruits and weapons of war."²⁷

Utility of Violence

Like jihadis, white supremacist extremists justify the use of extreme violence, in some cases bordering on anomie, by citing self-defense, inherently necessary because of the violence used by their adversaries. Both groups often deploy metaphors in their writings and propaganda that reflect a firm belief that their societies are under siege and that only violence can halt the "invaders."²⁸ For

²³ Michael Carpenter, "Russia Is Co-Opting Angry Young Men." *The Atlantic*, August 29, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2018/08/russia-is-co-opting-angry-young-men/568741/>; Josephine Huetlin, "Russian Extremists Are Training Right-Wing Terrorists From Western Europe." *The Daily Beast*, August 2, 2017, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/russian-extremists-are-training-right-wing-terrorists-from-western-europe>

²⁴ Kacper Rekawak, *Not Only Syria? The Phenomenon of Foreign Fighters in Comparative Perspective*, GLOBSEC, 2017.

²⁵ Controlling for target type, fatalities, and being arrested, attacks by Muslim perpetrators received, on average, 357% more coverage than other attacks. See Erin M. Kearns et al., "Why Do Some Terrorist Attacks Receive More Media Attention Than Others?" *Justice Quarterly*, 36: 6, 2019, pp.985-1022.

²⁶ Max Fisher, "White Terrorism Shows 'Stunning' Parallels to Islamic State's Rise," *New York Times*, August 5, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/05/world/americas/terrorism-white-nationalist-supremacy-isis.html>

²⁷ John R. Allen and Brett McGurk, "We Worked to Defeat the Islamic State. White Nationalist Terrorism is an Equal Threat," *Washington Post*, August 6, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/we-worked-to-defeat-the-islamic-state-white-nationalist-terrorism-is-an-equal-threat/2019/08/06/e50c90e8-b87d-11e9-bad6-609f75bfd97f_story.html

²⁸ Sulome Anderson, "The Twin Hatreds," *Washington Post*, March 22, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/posteverything/wp/2019/03/22/feature/how-white-supremacy-and-islamist-terrorism-strengthen-each-other-online/>



jihadis, this means an assault on Muslims by the West, which seeks to destroy Islam and humiliate the ummah. Conversely, white supremacist extremists fear encroachment from multiculturalism, immigration, and the so-called “Islamization” of society. White supremacist extremists propaganda relies on themes related to so-called “replacement theory,” or “the great replacement,” which is the idea that Western culture is under assault from demographic shifts favoring non-white immigrants, something WSEs believe is the deliberate strategy of a shadowy cabal of (mostly) Jewish elites.²⁹ The conspiracy theory claims an “intellectual” basis in the work of French philosopher Albert Camus and American eugenicist Madison Grant.³⁰ The exemplification of this violent ideology was captured in the motivation of Robert Bowers, the terrorist who attacked the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, PA in October 2018. Bowers appeared to target the Tree of Life because of what he perceived as the synagogue’s assistance for immigrants from Muslim-majority countries.³¹

Violence is viewed by both groups as something that is both utilitarian, but at times theatrical, intended to inspire followers while terrorizing others. Only through extreme violence can these groups achieve their goals, which requires inducing a climate of fear that can in turn be used to reshape society in the image they seek to create.³²

Cycle of Violence

In addition to serving as both the *means* and the *end* for both jihadists and WSEs, violence is also intended to beget further violence, contributing to a tit-for-tat cycle that inspires followers and provokes a reaction from those not considered within the terrorists’ in-group. Extreme violence serves as a complement to identity politics and the two are inextricably linked in ways that do not always appear obvious. The perceived threat to the identity of these groups is the “exact mirror image” of each other.³³ The comparison even extends to the naming of groups within these movements, as neo-Nazis recently adopted the name “The Base” for a new social networking platform connecting various elements of the extreme right.³⁴ “The Base” was the name selected by Osama bin Laden for his group, which when translated into Arabic means “Al-Qaeda.” In terms of organizational structure, white supremacists adopted the leaderless resistance model of terrorism

²⁹ Rosa Schwartzburg, “The ‘White Replacement Theory’ Motivates Alt-Right Killers The World Over,” *The Guardian*, August 5, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/aug/05/great-replacement-theory-alt-right-killers-el-paso>; see also, Jacob Davey and Julia Ebner, “The Great Replacement: The Violent Consequences of Mainstreamed Extremism,” Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD), 2019, <https://www.isdglobal.org/isd-publications/the-great-replacement-the-violent-consequences-of-mainstreamed-extremism/>

³⁰ John Eligon, “The El Paso Scream, and the Racist Doctrine Behind It,” *New York Times*, August 7, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/07/us/el-paso-shooting-racism.html>

³¹ Masha Gessen, “Why The Tree of Life Shooter Was Fixated on the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society,” *New Yorker*, October 27, 2018, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/why-the-tree-of-life-shooter-was-fixated-on-the-hebrew-immigrant-aid-society>

³² Ali Soufan, “I Spent 25 Years Fighting Jihadis. White Supremacists Aren’t So Different,” *New York Times*, August 5, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/05/opinion/white-supremacy-terrorism.html>

³³ Kathy Gilsinan, “How White-Supremacist Violence Echoes Other Forms of Terrorism,” *The Atlantic*, March 15, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/03/violence-new-zealand-echoes-past-terrorist-patterns/585043/>

³⁴ Ben Makuch and Mack Lamoureux, “Neo-Nazis Are Organizing Secretive Paramilitary Training Across America,” *Vice News*, November 20, 2018, https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/a3mexp/neo-nazis-are-organizing-secretive-paramilitary-training-across-america



before jihadists ever did, relying on attacks by lone actors as a means of minimizing infiltration of the movement by federal law enforcement agents in the 1980s.³⁵

Jihadi violence in the Middle East and North Africa has contributed to civil war and state failure, which in turn has driven migration of predominantly Muslim societies to Europe. As European countries receive ever-increasing applications for asylum—in 2015, the European Union received more than 1.3 million applications for asylum—segments of domestic populations in countries like Germany, France, the United Kingdom and elsewhere throughout the continent have perceived the demographic shift as threatening to their traditional values.³⁶ In some cases, this has led to the growth of movements like PEGIDA, or Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the West.³⁷

To extremists on both sides, the current state of world affairs is presented as an existential threat to their way of life, and exclusionist ideologies fuel a pushback against societal change.³⁸ Extremists also feel emboldened, convinced that violence will lead to revolutionary change. “Murderous Muslim militants, like America’s most dangerous young men, feel destiny if not righteous wrath behind them.”³⁹ Both movements also see attacks contributing to an “inspirational contagion” which will strengthen their respective organizations while encouraging further plots.⁴⁰ Each attack builds on the last and can have a cumulative effect, reinforcing the validity of propaganda that both jihadists and violent white supremacist extremists promote.⁴¹ As Simon Cottee notes, “jihadists and far-right violent extremists feed off each other, cynically exploiting the outrages of their enemies as a spur and justification for further retaliatory bloodshed.”⁴²

Virtual Laboratories/Use of Internet

The use of the internet itself is not new for terrorist groups, the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) in Mexico successfully harnessed power of the internet as early as 1994.⁴³ WSE

³⁵ Bruce Hoffman, “Back to the Future: The Return of Violent Far-Right Terrorism in the Age of Lone Wolves,” *War on the Rocks*, April 2, 2019, <https://warontherocks.com/2019/04/back-to-the-future-the-return-of-violent-far-right-terrorism-in-the-age-of-lone-wolves/>

³⁶ Julia Ebner, *The Rage*, London: I.B Tauris & Co. Ltd, London, 2017, p.79.

³⁷ Katrin Bennhold, “One Legacy of Merkel? Angry East German Men Fueling the Far Right,” *New York Times*, November 5, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/05/world/europe/merkel-east-germany-nationalists-populism.html>

³⁸ Melissa Etehad, “White Supremacists and Islamic State Recruits Have More in Common Than You Might Think,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 7, 2019, <https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2019-08-07/domestic-terrorism-white-supremacists-islamic-state-recruits>

³⁹ Reuel Marc Gerecht, “Violent Young Men, Here and Abroad,” *The Wall Street Journal*, August 13, 2019, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/violent-young-men-here-and-abroad-11565737090>

⁴⁰ Clint Watts, “America Has a White Nationalist Terrorism Problem. What Should We Do?” *Foreign Policy Research Institute (FPRI)*, May 1, 2019, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2019/05/america-has-a-white-nationalist-terrorism-problem-what-should-we-do/>

⁴¹ Rita Katz, “New Zealand Shooting: White Supremacists and Jihadists Feed Off Each Other,” *Daily Beast*, March 20, 2019, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/new-zealand-shooting-white-supremacists-and-jihadists-feed-off-each-other?ref=author>

⁴² Simon Cottee, “What Right-Wing Violent Extremists and Jihadists Have in Common,” *National Post*, April 5, 2019, <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/what-right-wing-violent-extremists-and-jihadists-have-in-common>

⁴³ Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 3rd ed., New York: Columbia University Press, 2017, p.210.



groups have also long been adept to operating in the online space.⁴⁴ The Internet helps perpetuate a “feedback loop of radicalization and violence” that is intended to accelerate the timetable toward an apocalyptic end of times.⁴⁵ There are legitimate concerns that the Internet has “accelerated the radicalization process,” although research demonstrates that there also remains a significant offline, or in-person component to how individuals radicalize.⁴⁶

In many ways, social media has exacerbated the issue by helping connect transnational nodes of like-minded individuals and groups. In the current environment, jihadis have flocked to sites like Telegram while WSEs and their supporters operate on Gab and 8chan. It serves as a medium for both radicalization and recruitment, as well as terrorist learning. WSEs have curated an online library of terrorist manuals and manifestos, while jihadists have created magazines like *Inspire* and *Dabiq* that have taught others how to conduct attacks.⁴⁷ It is also now well-documented that WSEs have used the internet to study terrorist tactics used by jihadists to improve their own capabilities.⁴⁸

Propaganda

Propaganda, media and public relations, and information operations of both jihadis and WSEs describe an existential battle between good and evil that form the cornerstone of these movements’ ideological beliefs. For jihadis, this eternal struggle is often framed in terms of the battle against the Zionist-Crusader alliance, while for violent white supremacist extremists, it is the call of racial holy war, or RAHOWA, that most resonates with its adherents. Both movements are also dualistic in nature, offering binary choices to potential followers to become part of the ideological in-group or risk being labeled as an enemy, apostate, or outsider.⁴⁹ The propaganda of jihadis and WSEs each portray members as defenders of a unique culture and bulwarks against cultural elites deemed unworthy of legitimacy.⁵⁰ And both jihadis and white supremacist extremists promote anti-Semitism, aspects of austere social conservatism and variations of obscure and antiquated eschatology.⁵¹

⁴⁴ Kathleen Belew, “The Right Way To Understand White Nationalist Terrorism,” *New York Times*, August 4, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/04/opinion/el-paso-terrorism.html>

⁴⁵ Max Fisher, “White Terrorism Shows ‘Stunning’ Parallels to Islamic State’s Rise,” *New York Times*, August 5, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/05/world/americas/terrorism-white-nationalist-supremacy-isis.html>

⁴⁶ Melissa Etehad, “White Supremacists and Islamic State Recruits Have More in Common Than You Might Think,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 7, 2019, <https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2019-08-07/domestic-terrorism-white-supremacists-islamic-state-recruits> see also, <https://www.lawfareblog.com/stop-isis-recruitment-focus-offline>

⁴⁷ Ali Soufan, “I Spent 25 Years Fighting Jihadis. White Supremacists Aren’t So Different,” *New York Times*, August 5, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/05/opinion/white-supremacy-terrorism.html>

⁴⁸ Frank Gardner, “The Unlikely Similarities Between the Far Right and IS,” *BBC*, March 30, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-47746271>

⁴⁹ Scott Stewart, “What White Supremacism and Jihadism Have in Common,” *Stratfor*, March 26, 2019, <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/what-white-supremacism-and-jihadism-have-common>

⁵⁰ Jim Sciutto, “The Striking Similarities Between the KKK and Islamist Jihadis,” *CNN.com*, August 17, 2017, <https://www.cnn.com/2017/08/17/opinions/striking-similarities-between-jihadis-and-kkk-sciutto/index.html>

⁵¹ Imogen Richards, “Right-Wing Extremism, Salafi Jihadism, and The War on Terror,” *ADI*, April 2019, <https://adi.deakin.edu.au/news/right-wing-extremism-salafi-jihadism-and-the-war-on-terror>



Each group also seeks to actively undermine the foundations of liberal democratic societies, which should be destroyed through violence and remade by a small vanguard of true believers.⁵² Both movements have also recognized the importance of key figures who have become an inspiration for the fringes of their respective movements. Jihadists revered the sermons of the American-born preacher and al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula figurehead Anwar al-Awlaki, whose radical views inspired numerous jihadi terrorists to launch attacks.⁵³ White supremacist extremists also have their own martyrdom figures, the most famous of which is Anders Breivik, the terrorist responsible for the attacks in Norway that killed 77 people at a summer camp for children back in 2011.⁵⁴ Breivik has been lauded as a “Saint” and “Commander” and whose beliefs were cited as inspiration by the Christchurch attacker Brenton Tarrant.⁵⁵

Recruitment

Terrorist propaganda serves as a key avenue for exposing potential supporters to radical ideologies and helping to recruit new members into extremist movements. While jihadis have long circulated martyrdom tapes and beheading videos, WSEs have livestreamed their attacks, as occurred in Christchurch, and published long manifestos that often reference previous high-profile attacks. By spreading these types of videos, extremists on both sides are attempting to reach individuals, primarily young men (though not exclusively) who may be alienated from broader society, feel marginalized or discriminated against, and who are disconnected from their communities.⁵⁶

Victimization forms a commonality across both movements, as does a distrust of political leaders and public institutions and a feeling of helplessness or ineptitude about how to find success and fulfillment in modern society.⁵⁷ Self-empowerment is a key element of the recruiting pitch, while both jihadis and WSEs focus on themes of “purity,” militancy, and physical fitness.⁵⁸ The martial aspects of recruitment appealed to generations of al-Qaeda militants who answered the call of holy war, traveling to training camps to learn guerilla warfare tactics and bombmaking techniques. In Ukraine, violent white supremacy extremist groups have bonded over shared interest in mixed martial arts and so-called “ultimate fighting” competitions. The Azov Battalion has used this venue as a method for growing its network, including with Neo-Nazis from the United States and the

⁵² Daniel Byman, “Terrorism and the Threat to Democracy,” Brookings Policy Brief, February 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/terrorism-and-the-threat-to-democracy/>

⁵³ Alexander Melagrou-Hitchens, “Why Awlaki Mattered,” *Wall Street Journal*, October 3, 2011, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052970204612504576606522230694328>

⁵⁴ Colin P. Clarke, “The Cult of Breivik,” *Slate*, March 18, 2019, <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2019/03/anders-breivik-new-zealand-right-wing-terrorism-inspiration.html>

⁵⁵ Lizzie Dearden, “Revered as a Saint by Online Extremists, How Christchurch Shooter Inspired Copycat Terrorists Around the World,” *Independent*, August 25, 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/australasia/brenton-tarrant-christchurch-shooter-attack-el-paso-norway-poway-a9076926.html>

⁵⁶ Melissa Etehad, “White Supremacists and Islamic State Recruits Have More in Common Than You Might Think,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 7, 2019, <https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2019-08-07/domestic-terrorism-white-supremacists-islamic-state-recruits>

⁵⁷ Jim Sciutto, “The Striking Similarities Between the KKK and Islamist Jihadis,” *CNN.com*, August 17, 2017, <https://www.cnn.com/2017/08/17/opinions/striking-similarities-between-jihadis-and-kkk-sciutto/index.html>

⁵⁸ Ali Soufan, “I Spent 25 Years Fighting Jihadis. White Supremacists Aren’t So Different,” *New York Times*, August 5, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/05/opinion/white-supremacy-terrorism.html>



West who have traveled to Ukraine to forge bonds with white supremacist extremists from Europe and elsewhere.⁵⁹

Financing

Financing is another area where similarities exist between how jihadists raise money and how white supremacist extremists seek to fund their organizations. Like jihadists, U.S. and overseas violent white supremacy organizations and individuals have leveraged both licit and illicit forms of finance, including a range of criminal activities, to sustain operations. In the post 9/11 era it has become much more difficult for jihadist groups to operate in the licit financial system, but as the Islamic State proved, it is possible to raise and spend money locally through a range of activities, from oil trafficking to extortion, and still remain a financially viable terrorist organization capable of governing large swaths of territory while simultaneously planning external operations.

Both crowdfunding and cryptocurrencies are a popular method of funding for white supremacist extremists, who have leveraged content creation social media platforms, such as Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook to seek funding. The intersection and overlap between social media, crowdfunding websites, and payment systems facilitate peer-to-peer (P2P) financial transactions in a manner that has served as an accelerant for violent white supremacy extremism fundraising. While it is impossible to precisely quantify the scope of the WSE's financial power it is, without question, very significant. Advances in technology and the power of social media and crowdfunding has allowed for both violent and non-violent radical right actors to avail themselves of a large number of like-minded donors who share similar fears. Playing on these fears in order to monetize hatred and discord is big business.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM COMBATING GLOBAL TERRORISM

Our current counterterrorism framework was set up in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 to deal exclusively with foreign terrorist groups like al-Qaeda. For example, the law allows for the monitoring of communications between people connected with foreign terrorist groups – even if they are United States citizens operating on American soil – and the sharing of the resulting intelligence among American agencies and with our allies. But those monitoring and intelligence-sharing tools cannot be used against those connected with terrorist groups based in the United States – no matter how dangerous – or even when these individuals have connections with WSE transnational groups that have been designated as terrorist organizations by our allies. This is today's reality because domestic terror supporters are protected by free speech laws in ways that jihadists (including those who are United States citizens) are not, and we have yet to designate transnational WSE organizations.

Since 2001, a long list of people have been indicted on a charge of providing material support to designated foreign terrorist entities like al-Qaeda. But for domestic terrorist organizations, material support charges are impossible because there is no mechanism for designating domestic terrorist groups as such. Moreover, domestic terror charges are harder to prove and carry penalties inadequate to the gravity of the offense. Even the Oklahoma City bomber, Timothy McVeigh, the

⁵⁹ Michael Colborne, "Friday Night Fights With Ukraine's Far Right," *New Republic*, July 9, 2019, <https://newrepublic.com/article/154434/friday-night-fights-ukraines-far-right>



worst domestic terrorist in the nation's history, was not charged with any terrorism offense for precisely this reason.

Many of our allies have already changed their own laws to allow more robust investigations of domestic terrorists. Britain's domestic intelligence agency, MI5, for example, can now use many of the same methods against domestic extremism that they have long deployed against al-Qaeda, thanks to laws passed following 9/11.

The F.B.I. should also be able to use many of the same counter-terrorism tools against domestic extremism as they currently have available for countering the Salafi-jihadist threat, with appropriate safeguards for our constitutional freedoms. But this can happen only if Congress updates our post-9/11 legislation to allow domestic terror groups to be designated in the same way as foreign ones. Our allies—including Germany, Canada, and the UK—have designated domestic terrorist organizations, and we must consider doing the same or at least designate the groups designated by our allies as Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs). This will allow our law-enforcement agencies access to the full suite of monitoring tools and our prosecutors the ability to bring meaningful charges for aiding domestic terrorism.

Twenty years ago, we grossly underestimated the rising threat of Islamist terrorism. That inattention cost us dearly on Sept. 11, 2001. We cannot afford to wait for the white-supremacist equivalent.