



THE  
SOUFAN  
CENTER

# A PERFECT STORM:

*Insurrection, Incitement, and  
the Violent Far-Right Movement*

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OCTOBER 2021

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Cover photo: Associated Press zz/STRF/STAR MAX/IPx; the United States Capitol Building in Washington, D.C. during the Capitol Insurrection on January 6, 2021

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AWD	Atomwaffen Division
BNP	British National Party
BUF	British Union of Fascists
CISA	Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency
CSIS	Center for Strategic and International Studies
CTED	United Nations Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
DOJ	Department of Justice
DVE	Domestic Violent Extremism / Extremist
EDL	English Defense League
FATF	Financial Action Task Force
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FKD	Feuerkrieg Division
FTO	Foreign Terrorist Organizations
FVEY	Five Eyes
GCHQ	Government Communications Headquarters
GCTS	United Nations Global Counterterrorism Strategy
IC	Intelligence Community
IJJ	International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law
IM	IronMarch.org
IP	Integralist Party of Great Britain
IRTL	Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation
ISIS	So-called Islamic State
MMA	Mixed Martial Arts
MP	Member of Parliament
MVE	Militia Violent Extremist
NA	National Action
NDEDIU	National Domestic Extremism and Disorder Intelligence Unit
NS131	National Socialist Anti-Capitalist Action
NSN	National Socialist Network
NSO	National Socialist Order
ODNI	Office of the Director of National Intelligence
PB-B	Proud Boys U.K. Chapter
PIRA	Provisional Irish Republican Army

PVL	Pohjoismainen Vastarintaliike (a.k.a. Nordic Resistance Movement)
RAM	Rise Above Movement
RIM	Russian Imperial Movement
RMVE	Racially or Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremist
SKD	Sonnenkrieg Division
SRN	System Resistance Network
SVR	Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service
UNOCT	United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
VRWE	Violent Right-Wing Extremist
WSE	White Supremacy Extremism
XRW	Extreme Right-Wing

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## KEY FINDINGS

- The events at the Capitol on January 6, 2021, have the potential to serve as inspiration for far-right violent extremists in Europe, the United Kingdom, and further across the globe. These linkages may be considered as materializing in three layers: *ideological*, *financial*, and *operational*, with each impacting the future direction and prospects of a transnational violent far-right movement.
- While the January 6 insurrection illustrated the diversity of the domestic violent extremism threat in the United States, it also provided a boon for the far-right movement online, where channels favored by white supremacy extremists also emulated international terrorists to encourage more acts of violence.
- The future of far-right violent extremism in the United Kingdom will likely be impacted by developments in the United States. The continued rise of neo-Nazi ideology and violent white supremacy is a global phenomenon and increasing connections and linkages between far-right extremists will strengthen existing networks and likely give rise to new ones. Many extremists in the U.K. are taking their cue from what is happening in the violent right-wing movement across the Atlantic and have also sought to emulate jihadist groups.
- Beyond domestic measures and military responses to terrorist threats in conflict zones, such as the Global Coalition Against Daesh, and bilateral counterterrorism operations, both the United States and the United Kingdom have developed and joined multilateral counterterrorism platforms and worked through the United Nations to address transnational terrorism. While the instruments and programs developed by the UN largely respond to the threat posed by al-Qaeda and ISIS, there are several tools that can be applied to addressing the threat from violent far-right groups.
- Recommendations include: investing in additional research and analysis and building on lessons learned from practitioner communities and states that have successfully dealt with the threat; developing a national framework for prevention in the U.S. and considering the designation as foreign terrorist organizations (FTOs) of foreign chapters of U.S.-based groups; assessing the impact of proscriptions in the U.K. and investing in disengagement programs and civil society initiatives; addressing drivers of violent extremism, including racism, intolerance, and inequality; working with international organizations to apply, where relevant, existing counterterrorism tools and resources to the threat of far-right terrorism.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Capitol Insurrection in the United States on January 6, 2021, sent shockwaves around the world.<sup>1</sup> From London to Canberra, and Ottawa to Auckland, millions watched as a mob of far-right violent extremists stormed the U.S. Capitol seeking to overturn the results of a free and fair presidential election that had already been certified many times as both legitimate and credible. Dozens of Capitol Police officers were injured and attacked with racist slurs by the crowd; chants could be heard throughout the crowd to “hang Mike Pence,” then Vice President.<sup>2</sup> The day after the attack, one of the Capitol Police officers died of a stroke linked by many to the attacks. Members of the crowd even erected makeshift gallows—not a prop that was hastily constructed, but rather a deliberate sign of the mob’s intentions. As of mid-September 2021, 608 federal cases have been brought against individuals involved in the January 6 attack.<sup>3</sup> Among those charged are members of established far-right extremist groups like the Oath Keepers and the Proud Boys, although according to data collected and analyzed by The Soufan Center, the vast majority of individuals charged are unaffiliated with formalized extremist groups. According to George Washington University’s Program on Extremism, over 70 individuals charged in connection with the Capitol riot have military experience.<sup>4</sup>

Law enforcement officers, analysts, and experts have worried that the events of January 6 have the potential to serve as a rallying cry or possible inspiration for far-right violent extremists in Europe, including in the United Kingdom, as well as further across the globe in the future. As experts writing for the *Counter Extremism Project* have noted, the overall far-right movement draws on several national or regional inspirations, including ideological motivation from an “Anglo-Saxon” milieu, where “via tracts published in the USA or practical [motivation] with certain British and American violent [extreme right-wing (XRW)] entities attempting either to lead coalitions of like-minded

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<sup>1</sup> The Soufan Center is grateful to Graham Macklin, David McKeever, and Vidhya Ramalingam for providing invaluable feedback on early drafts of this paper, and to all our interviewees for taking the time to share their experiences and insights. We remain deeply grateful to the Airey Neave Trust, U.K., for their support of this project.

<sup>2</sup> Baker, Peter, Maggie Haberman, and Annie Karni. “Pence Reached His Limit With Trump. It Wasn’t Pretty.” *New York Times*, January 12, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/12/us/politics/mike-pence-trump.html>.

<sup>3</sup> George Washington University. “Capitol Siege Cases,” *Program on Extremism*. September 15, 2021. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/Capitol-Hill-Cases>.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

international actors or directly branch out to other countries.”<sup>5</sup> After a year of lockdown and quarantine measures related to the coronavirus pandemic, linkages between the far-right in the United States and Europe have grown stronger, according to European counterterrorism officials.<sup>6</sup> According to reporting earlier this year by the *New York Times*, security officials “are increasingly concerned about a web of diffuse international links [between the American far-right and its European counterparts] and worry that the networks, already emboldened in the Trump era, have become more determined since Jan. 6.”<sup>7</sup> These linkages may be considered as materializing in three layers: *ideological*, *financial*, and *operational*, with each impacting the future direction and prospects of a transnational violent far-right movement. In many instances, it will be the ideological linkages and inspiration that warrant greater interest and attention, specifically as they lay the foundation for future financial and operational cooperation between groups.

As close counterterrorism partners, members of the Five Eyes (FVEY) intelligence partnership, and with a strong history of cooperation on the maintenance of international peace and security, the United States and the United Kingdom share many common security goals and approaches. However, in their respective domestic spheres, each country has a distinct legal and policy framework. Prosecuting domestic activity as a “terrorist” offense in the U.S. is possible, but far more difficult. The most used terrorist offense under the U.S. criminal code requires a link to a designated foreign terrorist organization. No equivalent exists for domestic organizations, however. In domestic terrorism cases, therefore, rather than bring prosecutions for those terrorist offenses which *are* applicable to domestic activity (but which consequently may be harder to prove), authorities tend to utilize other, general offenses (weapons charges, riot, hate-crimes, etc.). Additionally, the National Strategies do not contain mandatory actions for government entities, unlike the CONTEST Strategy, whose PREVENT program sets out a number of statutory duties for government institutions. This paper will therefore examine the risks and threats posed by violent far-right groups in both countries and consider if and how the events of “1/6” shape the violent extremist milieu on both sides of the Atlantic, along with the potential for transnational linkages that could diversify and intensify the international terrorist threat.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibsen, David et al. “Violent Right-Wing Extremism and Terrorism – Transnational Collectivity, Definitions, Incidents, Structures and Countermeasures.” *Counter Extremism Project*, November 2020. [https://www.counterextremism.com/sites/default/files/CEP%20Study\\_Violent%20Right-Wing%20Extremism%20and%20Terrorism\\_Nov%202020.pdf](https://www.counterextremism.com/sites/default/files/CEP%20Study_Violent%20Right-Wing%20Extremism%20and%20Terrorism_Nov%202020.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> Rotella, Sebastian. “Global Far-Right Extremism Networks are Growing. The U.S. is Just Now Catching Up.” *ProPublica*, January 22, 2021. <https://www.propublica.org/article/global-right-wing-extremism-networks-are-growing-the-u-s-is-just-now-catching-up>.

<sup>7</sup> Bennhold, Katrin and Michael Schwartz. “Capitol Riot Puts Spotlight on ‘Apocalyptically Minded’ Global Far Right.” *New York Times*, January 24, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/24/world/europe/capitol-far-right-global.html>.

## *A Note on Terminology*

This report uses “far-right extremism” or the “violent far-right” as umbrella terms encompassing political, social, and religious ideologies that support or endorse extreme right-wing views such as nativism, anti-communism, or ultranationalism, and the use of violence to achieve these goals. “Violent” is often specified to emphasize groups or actors that engage in harmful and illegal activities, rather than simply sharing different opinions, which would likely fall under the category of constitutionally protected speech in the United States. Anti-government extremists include the so-called Sovereign Citizen movement and myriad militia groups. Finally, far-right groups also often overlap in ideology and intent with miscellaneous “single-issue” extremists that promote the use of violence in support of a range of causes, including misogyny, anti-immigration, gun ownership, abortion, and societal changes (especially those that challenge notions of white male privilege), economic restructuring, and political resentment related to accusations of “Big Government” overreach,<sup>8</sup> many which have also informed key election campaigns and developments like “Brexit” in the United Kingdom. In the United States, the term used to reference far-right violence is currently “Racially or Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremism” (REMVE), to differentiate it from other forms of domestic violent extremism, including Militia Violent Extremists (MVE) and anti-government violent extremists (AGVE) whose aims are less centered on white supremacy extremism (WSE).

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<sup>8</sup> Piazza, James A. “The Determinants of Domestic Right-Wing Terrorism in the USA: Economic Grievance, Societal Change and Political Resentment,” *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, March 2017, 34(21), 52-80. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0738894215570429>.

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## THE VIOLENT FAR-RIGHT LANDSCAPE IN THE UNITED STATES

Over the past several years in the United States, there has been a resurgence of extremism and terrorism under the banner of far-right ideologies. Charleston, South Carolina; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Poway, California; El Paso, Texas. These are just a few of the many cities in the United States where violent acts have been perpetrated by individuals motivated by far-right extremism. Today, domestic terrorism poses the most acute and deadly terrorism threat to the United States. The October 2020 Homeland Threat Assessment by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) notes, “Ideologically motivated lone offenders and small groups pose the most likely terrorist threat to the Homeland, with Domestic Violent Extremists presenting the most persistent and lethal threat.”<sup>9</sup> On May 21, 2021, DHS Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas testified before the Senate Committee on Appropriations, saying, “Foreign terrorist organizations still seek to attack the United States and we remain vigilant in addressing that threat. While doing so, we recognize that the most significant and immediate terrorism-related threat currently facing our Nation is domestic violent extremism.”<sup>10</sup> In addition, according to a report by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI), released on March 1, 2021, “[domestic extremism actors] who are motivated by a range of ideologies and galvanized by recent political and societal events in the United States pose an elevated threat to the Homeland in 2021.” The report assessed that actors who adhere to far-right extremist beliefs, especially those championing the supremacy of the white race, pose the most lethal threat today and are most likely to target civilians.<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, the ODNI report notes that the Intelligence Community (IC) assesses “that racially or ethnically motivated violent extremists (RMVEs) and militia violent extremists (MVEs) present the most lethal domestic violent extremist (DVE) threats, with RMVEs most likely to conduct mass casualty attacks against civilians and MVEs typically targeting law enforcement and government personnel and facilities. The IC assesses that the MVE threat increased in 2020 and that it will

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<sup>9</sup> “Homeland Threat Assessment.” United States Department of Homeland Security, October 2020. [https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/2020\\_10\\_06\\_homeland-threat-assessment.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/2020_10_06_homeland-threat-assessment.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> Mayorkas, Alejandro. “Domestic Violent Extremism in America.” United States Department of Homeland Security, May 21, 2021. <https://www.appropriations.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/DHS%20Secretary%20Mayorkas%20Testimony%205.12.21.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> “Domestic Violent Extremism Poses Heightened Threat in 2021.” Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI), March 1, 2021. <https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/UnclassSummaryofDVEAssessment-17MAR21.pdf>.

almost certainly continue to be elevated throughout 2021 because of contentious sociopolitical factors that motivate MVEs to commit violence.”<sup>12</sup> In March 2021, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Director, Christopher Wray, voiced similar concerns in a testimony before the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee. Wray stated that “...the number of arrests, for example, of racially motivated violent extremists who are what you would categorize as white supremacists, last year [2020] was almost triple the number it was in my first year as director [2017].”<sup>13</sup>

These assessments of the current state of the terrorism threat to the U.S. homeland have been widely reaffirmed by experts outside of the government, who maintain that the threat has been growing throughout the 2000s. An April 2020 report by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) presented data that illustrates 2020 as the year with the highest number of domestic terrorism incidents and plots since the first-year data was collected, beginning in 1994. In addition, 2020 saw a 69% increase in domestic terrorism incidents and plots in the U.S. compared to 2019. However, the study noted that 2020 also saw an 86% decrease in fatalities from domestic terrorist attacks over 2019, a drop due in part to the absence of mass-casualty events like the 2019 El Paso shooting, which resulted in 22 of the year’s 35 killings.<sup>14</sup> One of the reasons for drastically fewer far-right involved mass casualty events in 2020 was pandemic-related lockdowns, which made it difficult for perpetrators to move, obtain supplies, and organize in public, and also removed a number of soft targets as the public remained largely at home. The lockdowns also had second order consequences, however, including fueling other DVE threats, particularly from militias.<sup>15</sup> In addition, underlying causes for the rise in far-right inspired violence over the past decades have likely not subsided. According to the FBI’s Hate Crime Statistics, 2020 saw the most reported hate crimes in 12 years—with the majority of incidents perpetrated by ethnically white people (over 55%) and the majority of victims (over 60%) targeted because of race/ethnicity/ancestry bias.<sup>16</sup>

Commenting on a February 2021 DHS bulletin noting the threat posed by domestic terrorism, former Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) director Chris Krebs said: “Those

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Wray, Christopher. “Oversight of the Federal Bureau of Investigation: The January 6 Insurrection, Domestic Terrorism, and Other Threats.” Federal Bureau of Investigation, March 2, 2021. <https://www.fbi.gov/news/testimony/oversight-of-the-federal-bureau-of-investigation-the-january-6-insurrection-domestic-terrorism-and-other-threats>.

<sup>14</sup> Doxsee, Catrina, Grace Hwang, and Seth G. Jones. “The Military, Police, and the Rise of Terrorism in the United States.” *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, April 12, 2021. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/military-police-and-rise-terrorism-united-states>.

<sup>15</sup> Macklin, Graham. “The Conspiracy to Kidnap Governor Gretchen Whitmer.” *CTC Sentinel*, 14, no. 6, July/August 2021, 1-15. <https://ctc.usma.edu/the-conspiracy-to-kidnap-governor-gretchen-whitmer/>.

<sup>16</sup> “FBI Releases 2020 Hate Crime Statistics.” Federal Bureau of Investigation: Press Release, September 15, 2021. <https://www.fbi.gov/news/pressrel/press-releases/fbi-releases-2020-hate-crime-statistics>.

issues have been well known, well established for a number of years. It's the first time, though, that I've seen it really distilled down so cleanly and clearly in a bulletin like that." The event served to reaffirm the calls made by many experts in and out of government to take the domestic terrorist threat more seriously. Instead, the lion's share of law enforcement and intelligence attention has focused singularly on the transnational terrorism threat primarily posed by organizations like al-Qaeda, the so-called Islamic State (ISIS), and their respective affiliates, branches, and franchise groups. A former FBI agent who worked on countering domestic terrorism for over 20 years, described it as a "tier two" category in the FBI's terrorism work in terms of priority—funding, expertise, and the sheer number of agents—compared to international terrorism.<sup>17</sup>

### *The January 6 Insurrection and Violent Extremism*

On January 6, 2021, the United States Capitol in Washington, D.C. was violently attacked by a mob of supporters of President Donald Trump. The mob, which included violent extremists, was inspired and incited by President Trump during a speech where he repeated false claims that the 2020 presidential election was fraudulent. The mob subsequently stormed the Capitol building to overturn the outcome of the election by disrupting a joint session of Congress gathered to formalize President-elect Joe Biden's victory. Despite several legal challenges, the election had already been certified and was widely deemed credible and legitimate by independent observers. For example, on November 12, 2020, CISA released a statement on the general election, noting that "The November 3rd election was the most secure in American history."<sup>18</sup> According to extremism and radicalization expert Daniel Koehler, one of the most significant impacts of January 6 was the radicalization of certain aspects of the Republican party. Koehler described the insurrection as a tipping point that forced certain GOP members to stick with rioters. These politicians and media figures "went so far with Trump" that after the storming of the Capitol, they felt as if they could not back down. In the end, Koehler remarked, this was a "major win" for far-right extremists.<sup>19</sup>

FBI Director Wray has labeled the events of January 6 an act of "domestic terrorism"<sup>20</sup> and expressed concerns that the event may serve as a point of inspiration for violent extremists in the

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<sup>17</sup> Interview, Thomas O'Connor, FEDSquared Consulting LL, June 23, 2021.

<sup>18</sup> "Joint Statement from Elections Infrastructure Government Coordinating Council & the Election Infrastructure Sector Coordinating Executive Committees." Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, November 12, 2020. <https://www.cisa.gov/news/2020/11/12/joint-statement-elections-infrastructure-government-coordinating-council-election>.

<sup>19</sup> Interview, Daniel Koehler, Director, German Institute on Radicalization and De-Radicalization Studies (GIRDS), September 2021.

<sup>20</sup> Lucas, Ryan. "FBI Director Defends Agency in Testimony, Calls Jan. 6 Attack 'Domestic Terrorism.'" *National Public Radio*, March 2, 2021. <https://www.npr.org/2021/03/02/972970812/fbi-director-defends-agency-in-testimony-calls-jan-6-attack-domestic-terrorism>.



*The United States Capitol Building in Washington, D.C. was breached by thousands of protesters during a "Stop The Steal" rally in support of President Donald Trump on January 6, 2021. (Credit: AP Photo/Mihoko Owada/STAR MAX/IPx 2021)*

future. His sentiments were echoed in a declassified report compiled by U.S. intelligence agencies, which noted that domestic violent extremist actors may be “galvanized by recent political and societal events in the United States.”<sup>21</sup> In June 2021, the Biden administration released a national strategy for countering domestic terrorism, the first strategy of its kind.<sup>22</sup> Most notably, in contrast to previous government documents, the strategy labels the threat as “terrorism” rather than “domestic violent extremism.” The strategy is clearly articulated as ideologically agnostic in its approach; no matter the ideology motivating an act of domestic terrorism—be it far-left, far-right, Islamist, etc.—the strategy is exclusively focused on the violent manifestation of an ideology, not the ideology itself. Still, it is important to note that even though the strategy deals with countering domestic terrorism, the previously outlined difficulties in prosecuting domestic terrorism in the United States remain.<sup>23</sup> Interestingly, perhaps wary of being labeled or characterized along partisan political lines, the strategy stops short of offering a concrete policy recommendation on a potential domestic terrorism statute. At the very least, it seems appropriate that the Biden administration hold public hearings on Capitol Hill to debate the pros and cons of such a law, making the process as

<sup>21</sup> “Domestic Violent Extremism Poses Heightened Threat in 2021.” Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI), March 1, 2021. <https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/UnclassSummaryofDVEAssessment-17MAR21.pdf>.

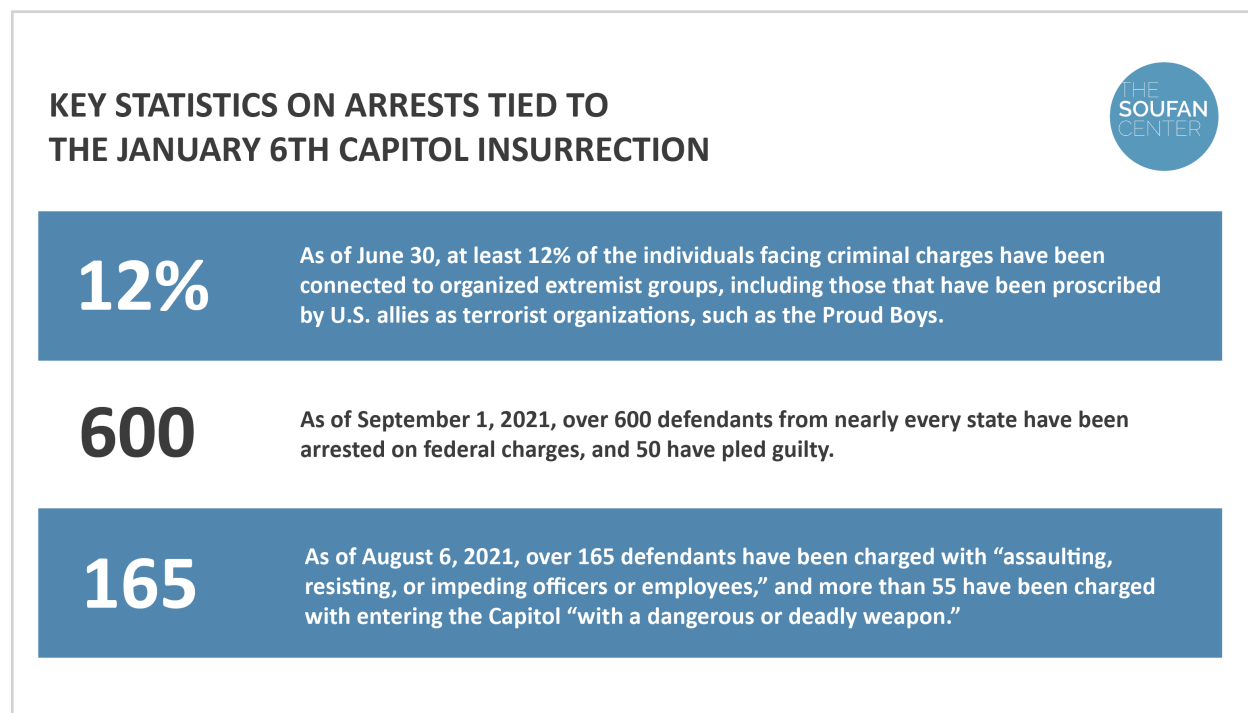
<sup>22</sup> “National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism.” National Security Council, June 2021. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/National-Strategy-for-Countering-Domestic-Terrorism.pdf>.

<sup>23</sup> McCord, Mary B. and Jason Blazakis. “A Road Map for Congress to Address Domestic Terrorism.” *Lawfare*, February 27, 2019. <https://www.lawfareblog.com/road-map-congress-address-domestic-terrorism>.

transparent as possible and bringing together legal scholars, counterterrorism analysts, and academics who have spent their careers working on domestic terrorism.

According to analysis by The Soufan Center (TSC) of documents published by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) on the Capitol Breach Investigation Resource Page, as of June 30, 2021, at least 12% of the individuals facing criminal charges have been connected to formal extremist organizations, including those that have been proscribed by U.S. allies as terrorist organizations, such as the Proud Boys. As of September 1, 2021, over 600 defendants from nearly every state have been arrested on federal charges, and 50 have pled guilty.<sup>24</sup> The five states with the most citizens arrested for their involvement in January 6 are: Florida, Texas, Pennsylvania, New York, and California.<sup>25</sup> According to the DOJ, as of August 6, 2021, over 165 defendants have been charged with “assaulting, resisting, or impeding officers or employees,” and more than 55 have been charged with entering the Capitol “with a dangerous or deadly weapon.”<sup>26</sup>

**Figure 1: Key Statistics on Arrests Tied to the January 6th Capitol Insurrection**



<sup>24</sup> Cohen, Marshall. “US Capitol Riot: 50th Rioter Pleads Guilty as DOJ Nears 600 Arrests.” *CNN Politics*. September 1, 2021. <https://www.cnn.com/2021/09/01/politics/capitol-riot-50-guilty-pleas-600-arrests/index.html>.

<sup>25</sup> “Mapping Insecurity.” *The Soufan Center*, January 2021. <https://thesoufancenter.org/mapping-insecurity/>.

<sup>26</sup> “Six Months Since the January 6th Attack on the Capitol.” United States Department of Justice, August 6, 2021. <https://www.justice.gov/usao-dc/six-months-january-6th-attack-capitol>.

While the DOJ's findings illustrate that a large majority of individuals who participated in the January 6 attack are seemingly unaffiliated with a formal extremist organization or specific extremist ideology, they also highlight the diversity of the domestic terrorism threat in the United States, and the potency of the ideologies and narratives circulated and promoted by far-right groups. Indeed, the deadliest domestic terrorism attacks perpetrated on U.S. soil in past decades, including the 1995 Oklahoma City Bombing<sup>27</sup>, the 2018 Tree of Life synagogue attack<sup>28</sup>, and the 2019 El Paso shooting<sup>29</sup>, have been perpetrated by individuals not claiming a formal affiliation to a specific group, and who later serve as powerful sources of inspiration and motivation for subsequent attacks. While the threat is clear from a domestic perspective in the U.S., there are also growing transnational linkages, ideological and financial, between far-right extremists who are moving money, ideas, and persons across borders.<sup>30</sup> An expert who has studied far-right extremism for the past two decades noted that, "the internationalization of far-right extremism is front and center in today's extremist landscape—where the dissemination of hate across borders has significantly surged within the past decade."<sup>31</sup>

Given the differences in domestic legislation in several countries, there is also a growing concern among many in the private sector regarding the inconsistency in guidelines that determine which violent far-right groups may be considered terrorist organizations; in comparison, many companies and governments reference domestic and international terrorist designations (such as those related to al-Qaeda and ISIS) in determining the identification and responses to terrorist financing risks, though there are a number of options outlined in the recommendations below.<sup>32</sup> While the phenomenon of far-right extremists making transnational connections has historical precedent, multiple experts interviewed for this project highlighted the ways in which the Internet and social media have facilitated easier and faster connections between far-right extremists in different countries, although this is not unique to the far-right movement.

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<sup>27</sup> For more on the Oklahoma City Bombing, see: Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, 101-103.

<sup>28</sup> For more on the Tree of Life synagogue attack and other attacks against Jewish targets, see: Silber, Mitchell D. "Terrorist Attacks Against Jewish Targets in the West (2012-2019): The Atlantic Divide Between European and American Attackers." *CTC Sentinel*, May/June 2019, 12(15). <https://ctc.usma.edu/terrorist-attacks-jewish-targets-west-2012-2019-atlantic-divide-european-american-attackers/>.

<sup>29</sup> For more on the El Paso shooting, see: Macklin, Graham. "The El Paso Terrorist Attack: The Chain Reaction of Global Right-Wing Terror." *CTC Sentinel*, December 2019, 12(11). <https://ctc.usma.edu/el-paso-terrorist-attack-chain-reaction-global-right-wing-terror/>.

<sup>30</sup> Blazakis, Jason M. and Naureen Chowdhury Fink. "The International Far-Right Terrorist Threat Requires a Multilateral Response." *Lawfare*, April 4, 2021. <https://www.lawfareblog.com/international-far-right-terrorist-threat-requires-multilateral-response>.

<sup>31</sup> Interview, Joanna Mendelson, Associate Director, Center on Extremism, Anti-Defamation League, June 23, 2021.

<sup>32</sup> "IntelBrief: Emerging Terrorist Financing Threats and Trends." The Soufan Center, March 12, 2021. <https://thesoufancenter.org/intelbrief-2021-march-12/>.

## *Formal Extremist Organizations and Transnational Connections*

An examination of charges brought against individuals with ties to formal extremist organizations who participated in the January 6 attacks reveals the important symbolic and organizational roles that groups like the Proud Boys and Oath Keepers played during the event. Details included in legal documents outlining charges from January 6 showcase coordination, preparation, and tactical expertise among members of formal extremist organizations that contributed to the day's violence. Specifically, some of the most serious charges to date have been brought against individuals who were members of militia organizations or far-right extremist groups. Moreover, the online activity of some groups following January 6 suggests that they were actively recruiting from among the disaffected and frustrated members of the mob. TSC analysis of legal documents found that, as of June 30, 2021, at least 65 individuals charged in connection to January 6 are affiliated with a violent extremist organization such as the Proud Boys, the Oath Keepers, the loosely tied Three Percenters, or a white supremacy extremist organization. Of these individuals, over 63% have been charged with conspiracy. Evidence outlined in DOJ documents showcase how members of these formal extremist organizations prepared and coordinated for months prior to conducting violence on January 6, some with the political goal to disrupt the certification of the election. Moreover, according to TSC data gathering and analysis, the organization with the most affiliated individuals charged in connection to January 6 is the Proud Boys, with at least 30 linked individuals charged as of June 30, 2021.

The Proud Boys is a fascist, anti-Islamic, and misogynistic group known to espouse white supremacy extremist ideology whose members have been involved in many acts of violence predating January 6.<sup>33</sup> Court documents detail how members of the Proud Boys planned and organized acts of violence for and during January 6. Specifically, the Proud Boys leader Enrique Tarrio (arrested prior to January 6 on unrelated charges), along with five other group members, were part of a leadership and planning group known as the "Ministry of Self-Defense" established in December 2020 in preparation for January 6.<sup>34</sup> Actions undertaken by this leadership group included organizing video calls to plan for January 6, crowdfunding efforts, and coordinating with members during the day of

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<sup>33</sup> "IntelBrief: The Proud Boys Viral Moment – Will It Devolve Into a Virulent Threat?" The Soufan Center, October 6, 2020. <https://thesoufancenter.org/intelbrief-the-proud-boys-viral-moment-will-it-devolve-into-a-virulent-threat/>; "Proud Boys." *Southern Poverty Law Center*. <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/proud-boys>; "Proud Boys." *Anti-Defamation League*. <https://www.adl.org/proudboys>.

<sup>34</sup> United States vs. Ethan Nordean, Joseph Biggs, Zachary Rehl, and Charles Donohoe. 21-cr-175 (TJK), (D.C. January 8, 2021). <https://www.justice.gov/usao-dc/case-multi-defendant/file/1377586/download>; Roston, Aram. "EXCLUSIVE: Before Jan. 6, FBI Collected Information from at Least 4 Proud Boys." *Reuters*, April 26, 2021. <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/exclusive-before-jan-6-fbi-collected-information-least-4-proud-boys-2021-04-26/>.

the insurrection.<sup>35</sup> According to legal documents, on December 30, 2020, one of the leaders of the “Ministry of Self-Defense” shared a link to an online fundraiser campaign titled “Travel Expenses for upcoming Patriot Events,” which generated over \$5,500 USD in donations in less than a week.<sup>36</sup>

Apart from internal coordination and planning efforts ahead of January 6, legal documents detail how members of the Proud Boys coordinated in December 2020 with another organization present on the ground that day, the Oath Keepers. On December 19, 2020, an alleged member of the Florida Oath Keepers wrote: “...this week I organized an alliance between Oath Keepers, Florida 3%ers, and Proud Boys. We have decided to work together and shut this s[\*\*]t down.” Three days later, the same individual wrote: “Plus we have made Contact with PB and they always have a big group. Force multiplier ... I figure we could splinter off the main group of PB and come up behind them.”<sup>37</sup>

The coordination between formalized extremist organizations echoes the 2017 “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, which brought together multiple far-right extremist groups that had not been previously known to coordinate or cooperate, including for funding purposes.<sup>38</sup> Galvanized by the steady removal of Confederate statues and symbols across the American South, the “Unite the Right” rally was organized to protest the Charlottesville City Council’s decision to remove a statue of the Confederate general Robert E. Lee. The violence that unfolded over the two-day rally resulted in the murder of a peaceful counter-protester, 32-year-old Heather Heyer, in a vehicular ramming perpetrated by an avowed white supremacist, along with dozens of injuries.<sup>39</sup> The rally created an enabling space for violent far-right extremist groups and indicated a shifting locus of the extreme right-wing in the U.S. Consequently, rather than dismissing such gatherings as random and uncoordinated, American law enforcement and the intelligence community should be especially wary of groups coordinating with each other for large-scale events and overall, need to be far better prepared to respond to a number of contingencies or developments related to protests or marches that have the potential to spiral into violence.

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<sup>35</sup> Owen, Tess. “Proud Boys Chat Reveals How They Coordinated During the Capitol Riot.” *VICE News*, May 14, 2021. <https://www.vice.com/en/article/v7edp3/proud-boys-chats-reveal-how-they-coordinated-during-the-capitol-riot>.

<sup>36</sup> United States vs. Ethan Nordean, Joseph Biggs, Zachary Rehl, and Charles Donohoe. 21-cr-175 (TJK), (D.C. January 8, 2021). <https://www.justice.gov/usao-dc/case-multi-defendant/file/1377586/download>.

<sup>37</sup> United States vs. Kelly Meggs. 1:21-cr-28 (APM), (D.C. March 23, 2021). <https://int.nyt.com/data/documenttools/oath-keepers-proud-boys/605aa93a48fbae1e/full.pdf>.

<sup>38</sup> Weill, Kelly. “‘Private Funding’ Fueled Nazis in Charlottesville: Lawsuit.” *Daily Beast*, September 22, 2021. <https://www.thedailybeast.com/private-funding-fueled-nazis-at-hate-rally-in-charlottesville-sines-v-kessler-lawsuit-shows>.

<sup>39</sup> Romo, Vanessa. “Charlottesville Jury Convicts ‘Unite The Right’ Protester Who Killed Woman.” *National Public Radio*, December 7, 2018. <https://www.npr.org/2018/12/07/674672922/james-alex-fields-unite-the-right-protester-who-killed-heather-heyer-found-guilt>.



*A screenshot taken from video of Williams donning a skull-mask, which is often associated with individuals adhering to white supremacy extremist and accelerationist ideology, and a hat with a Sonnenrad (the black sun), a symbol commonly adopted by the transnational white supremacy extremist movement. (Source: Bellingcat, February 24, 2021)*

Some of the most violent and disturbing cases linked to January 6 are those connected to individuals who adhere to white supremacist ideology. Lonnie Coffman, a 71-year-old Army veteran and member of the white supremacist militia Camp Lonestar in Texas,<sup>40</sup> was charged with bringing a cache of weapons to the U.S. Capitol—including 11 Molotov cocktails, five loaded firearms, a crossbow, and machetes.<sup>41</sup> Court documents detail evidence that Riley June Williams, a 22-year-old woman from Pennsylvania, allegedly stole Nancy Pelosi's laptop and hard drive with the intention of selling it to Russia's foreign intelligence service (SVR).<sup>42</sup> Other open-source evidence suggests that Williams has espoused anti-Semitic and Neo-Nazi sentiments and appears to be an adherent of accelerationism.<sup>43</sup> Accelerationism supports

actions taken to exploit contradictions intrinsic to a political system to “accelerate” its destruction through the friction caused by its features.<sup>44</sup>

The case of Williams underlines the need for analysts and the intelligence community to further investigate the potential ties between domestic violent extremists and the Kremlin and its agents. Financial connections between American far-right actors and Russian organizations, such as that between Matthew Heimbach and the Russian Imperial Movement (RIM), are well-established.<sup>45</sup> In 2020, the notorious British far-right extremist, Steven Yaxley-Lennon, a.k.a. Tommy Robinson, traveled on a speaking tour in Russia and reportedly sought to open local bank accounts to move

<sup>40</sup> “Border Militiamen Detaining Immigrants, Sowing Fear Among Camp’s Neighbors.” *Southern Poverty Law Center*, October 9, 2014. <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2014/10/09/border-militiamen-detaining-immigrants-sowing-fear-among-camp-s-neighbors>.

<sup>41</sup> Hsu, Spencer S. “Man Charged With Bringing Molotov Cocktails to Capitol on Jan. 6 Has Texas Militia Ties, Contacted Ted Cruz’s Office.” *Washington Post*, May 24, 2021. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/legal-issues/molotov-cocktail-capitol-riot/2021/05/24/b97c5e6c-bce1-11eb-b26e-53663e6be6ff\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/legal-issues/molotov-cocktail-capitol-riot/2021/05/24/b97c5e6c-bce1-11eb-b26e-53663e6be6ff_story.html).

<sup>42</sup> “Statement of Facts: Riley June Williams.” United States Department of Justice, January 19, 2021. <https://www.justice.gov/opa/page/file/1357051/download>.

<sup>43</sup> “Woman Accused of Stealing Nancy Pelosi’s Laptop Appears in Video Making Nazi Salute.” *Bellingcat*, February 24, 2021. <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/americas/2021/02/24/woman-accused-of-stealing-nancy-pelosis-laptop-appears-in-video-making-nazi-salute/>.

<sup>44</sup> Flade, Florian. “Insider Threat: Far-Right Extremism in the German Military and Police.” *CTC Sentinel*, 14, no. 5, June 2021. <https://ctc.usma.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/CTC-SENTINEL-052021.pdf>; Parker, Jade. “Accelerationism in America: Threat Perceptions.” *Global Network on Extremism and Technology*, February 4, 2021. <https://gnet-research.org/2020/02/04/accelerationism-in-america-threat-perceptions/>.

<sup>45</sup> “Special Report: Inside the Russian Imperial Movement: Practical Implications of U.S. Sanctions.” *The Soufan Center*, April 2020. <https://thesoufancenter.org/research/inside-the-russian-imperial-movement-practical-implications-of-u-s-sanctions/>.

money to the country.<sup>46</sup> Robinson has supported the Proud Boys for many years, for which he was banned from most mainstream social media platforms in 2018.<sup>47</sup> Robinson and the Proud Boys chairman Enrique Tarrio spoke shortly after the 2020 U.S. general election and had a conversation in which Robinson encouraged Tarrio's organization to keep Trump in power. Following the events of January 6, Robinson expressed support for the violent insurrection and proclaimed that it was "just the beginning."<sup>48</sup>

Another trend discernible in the insurrection is the disproportionate number of individuals with some form of military experience who partook in the violence on January 6. Extensive analysis of court documents by the George Washington University's Program on Extremism illustrated that, as of June 30, 2021, at least 10% of those implicated in federal cases in relation to January 6 have military experience.<sup>49</sup> Given that only an estimated 7% of U.S. citizens have some form of military experience,<sup>50</sup> this indicates that current and former military personnel are slightly over-represented among January 6 arrestees. According to TSC data gathering and analysis of open-source documents, articles, and reports, as of June 30, 2021, of the 65 individuals charged in connection with January 6 who are affiliated with a formal extremist organization—like the Oath Keepers or the Proud Boys—more than 33% are active or former service members. It is important that law enforcement and researchers continue to investigate how military experience and other forms of tactical knowledge may have contributed to the violence on January 6—especially given the notable share of arrestees with military connections who are also linked to formal extremist organizations—to underscore the tactical boon provided to extremist groups who recruit individuals with such knowledge to help commit acts of violence.<sup>51</sup>

This is not a trend that is exclusive to the insurrection and the organizations present on the ground that day, but rather illustrative of the broader violent extremist landscape within the United States. Many far-right organizations target individuals with active or former military experience to enhance

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<sup>46</sup> Bradley, Jane and Michael Schwartz. "U.K. Far Right, Lifted By Trump, Now Turns to Russia." *New York Times*, April 23, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/23/world/europe/uk-far-right-tommy-robinson-russia.html>.

<sup>47</sup> Owen, Tess. "Supporting Hate Groups Like the Proud Boys Got Far-Right Leader Tommy Robinson Kicked Off Facebook." *VICE News*, February 26, 2021. <https://www.vice.com/en/article/59xkdz/supporting-hate-groups-like-the-proud-boys-got-far-right-uk-leader-tommy-robinson-kicked-off-facebook>.

<sup>48</sup> Bradley, Jane and Michael Schwartz. "U.K. Far Right, Lifted By Trump, Now Turns to Russia." *New York Times*, April 23, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/23/world/europe/uk-far-right-tommy-robinson-russia.html>.

<sup>49</sup> "Capitol Hill Siege." *George Washington University*. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/Capitol-Hill-Cases>.

<sup>50</sup> Vespa, Jonathan. "Those Who Served: America's Veterans From World War II to the War on Terror." United States Census Bureau, June 2, 2020. <https://www.census.gov/content/census/en/library/publications/2020/demo/acs-43.html>.

<sup>51</sup> Cohen, Michael. "Jessica Watkins: Alleged Oath Keeper Ringleader in Capitol Siege Ordered to Stay in Jail before Trial." *CNN Politics*, February 26, 2021. <https://www.cnn.com/2021/02/26/politics/jessica-watkins-oath-keepers-capitol-attack/index.html>.

their credibility and overall operational capabilities. This trend is not unique to the United States; take for example Germany, which recently was forced to disband a number of military units due to their ties to far-right extremism. The tactical advantage of military experience is evident in videos showing how some individuals with military training behaved during and after January 6—moving in formations, communicating via radio, and even attempting to apply tactics learned when fighting insurgencies overseas. Following the insurrection, one member of the Proud Boys who served in Afghanistan as part of the National Guard exchanged advice on how to apply guerilla tactics: “Remember how we hunted (Taliban), they are hunting us the same way. Remember how the (Taliban) were able to counter us and defeat us. Use those tactics.”<sup>52</sup>

### *Online Reactions and Trends*

While the January 6 insurrection illustrated the diversity of the domestic violent extremism threat in the United States—ranging from seemingly unaffiliated individuals motivated by conspiracy theories to organized groups sporting military-grade equipment—it also provided a boon for the far-right movement online. Individuals operating in encrypted chat forums seized on the attack to build momentum to further radicalize, recruit, and call for more acts of violence. It is difficult to trace direct causal lines from such activities and incitement with subsequent attacks, but it is worth noting that several “near misses” or disrupted attacks have since taken place.<sup>53</sup> On January 7, 2021, Tarrio shared a post on Parler—a social network affiliated with Trump supporters and far-right content—praising the Capitol attackers as “revolutionaries.” Similar to how Salafi-jihadist organizations like ISIS and al-Qaeda celebrate their dead, far-right chat forums glorified Ashli Babbitt—the woman who was shot and killed by security forces while climbing through a window at the Capitol—creating content portraying her as a martyr. Even elected politicians have publicly expressed sympathy for the January 6 attack perpetrators and other far-right assailants. Tension erupted recently when Arizona Congressman Paul Gosar wore a “For Ashli” bracelet in a photo he posted to Twitter. In another instance, after a North Carolina man threatened to bomb the Library of Congress near the U.S. Capitol in late August 2021, Alabama Republican Congressman Mo Brooks appeared to sympathize with the assailant, suggesting that he understood “citizenry anger directed at dictatorial

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<sup>52</sup> Eisenstadt, Marnie. “The Matthew Greene No One Knew: ‘Proud Boy’ Fought For His Country Then Turned Against It.” *Syracuse.com*, April 27, 2021. <https://www.syracuse.com/news/2021/04/the-matthew-greene-no-one-knew-proud-boy-fought-for-his-country-then-turned-against-it.html>. [https://www.scribd.com/document/513963989/Matthew-Greene-Government-Opposition#from\\_embed](https://www.scribd.com/document/513963989/Matthew-Greene-Government-Opposition#from_embed).

<sup>53</sup> Blazakis, Jason M. “Opinion: It’s a real possibility that our next 9/11 could arrive from within.” *Washington Post*, September 6, 2021. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/09/06/its-real-possibility-that-our-next-911-could-arrive-within/>.

Socialism and its threat to liberty, freedom and the very fabric of American society.”<sup>54</sup> Several high-profile Republican members of Congress have openly sympathized with the insurrectionists, which, along with Republican reluctance to pursue investigations of the insurrection or approve a commission such as that established after the September 11 attacks, foreshadow a mainstreaming of extremists’ positions within broader American political life.

The massive deplatforming campaign that was undertaken by popular social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook spurred a migration of the far-right to more fringe chat forums and platforms such as Telegram, MeWe, Gab, and Rumble.<sup>55</sup> As a result, several white supremacy chat forums and other far-right-affiliated channels and formal extremist organizations have increased their opposition towards Big Tech and Silicon Valley. They have portrayed this as evidence of infringements on freedom of speech and expression, claiming “cancel culture” run amok.<sup>56</sup> The deplatformings also spurred a plethora of chatter on several violent and extremist-espousing white supremacist Telegram channels on how to recruit disillusioned Trump supporters most effectively. A user on one of these channels wrote: “This is our opportunity Things are accelerating day by day pretty fast. Your mission is to invite [MAGA supporters] into our spaces. Tell them there is a solution to their problem...Seize the opportunity.”<sup>57</sup>



Source: Twitter, @RawStory, July 30, 2021.

Following the January 6 attacks, online channels favored by white supremacy extremists also emulated international terrorists to encourage more acts of violence. For example, on January 11, 2021, a Telegram channel posted “you’re the new jihadi john now. best to get to work. like jihadi john you’re going to need a rifle. a camera. fanaticism. but you’re also going to have some things he

<sup>54</sup> Wang, Amy B. “Lawmakers denounce GOP Rep. Brooks for appearing sympathetic to Capitol bomb threat suspect.” *Washington Post*, August 20, 2021. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/08/19/lawmakers-denounce-gop-rep-brooks-appearing-sympathetic-capitol-bomb-threat-suspect/>.

<sup>55</sup> Mak, Aaron. “Where MAGA Insurrectionists and QAnon Followers Will Post Now.” *Slate*, January 13, 2021. <https://slate.com/technology/2021/01/twitter-facebook-parler-gab-telegram-maga-qanon.html>; Perez, Sarah. “This Week in Apps: Parler Deplatformed, Alt Apps Rise, Looking Back at 2020 Trends.” *Tech Crunch*, January 16, 2021. <https://techcrunch.com/2021/01/16/this-week-in-apps-parler-deplatformed-alt-apps-rise-looking-back-at-2020-trends/>.

<sup>56</sup> Interview with team of Tech Against Terrorism analysts specializing in far-right online trends, June 22, 2021.

<sup>57</sup> TSC data gathering of White Supremacy Extremist-affiliated Telegram channel, January 6, 2021. Captured February, 2021.

didn't. a livestream. a place on the saint leaderboard. a victory." These online trends have also been reflected in the tactics and narratives of January 6 defendants. Prosecutors have detailed that the social media posts of one defendant from Utah included references to bombings and honored Babbitt,<sup>58</sup> and many insurrectionists referenced her as a martyr, highlighting the important symbolic—and real—roles of women in the far-right movement.<sup>59</sup>

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## CASE STUDY | Transatlantic Connections: The Proud Boys U.K. Telegram Channel

*While the Proud Boys is primarily a U.S.-based organization with so-called "chapters" in almost every state, they also maintain international chapters in Australia, Europe, and the United Kingdom. The Canadian chapter was reportedly disbanded in 2021 following Canada's decision to add the Proud Boys to the country's terrorism list, alongside al-Qaeda, ISIS, and far-right violent extremist groups like the Atomwaffen Division.<sup>60</sup> Little open-source information exists on the Proud Boys' international chapters, leadership, and organization. A social media analysis of the Telegram channel affiliated with the Proud Boys U.K. chapter (PB-B), however, has yielded some insights into their activities following the insurrection—in which some of their American counterparts were instrumental. Most notably, subscribers to the PB-B channel increased almost immediately following January 6. On January 5, 2021, the channel had 3,390 subscribers; a month later it had over 4,450 subscribers, an increase of nearly 35%. Since then, the channel has lost about 40 subscribers, but it is notable that PB-B has retained most of the following it gained as a direct result of January 6.<sup>61</sup>*

*Posts and commentary on the PB-B-affiliated Telegram channel highlight specific activities of the group: activism (posting flyers etc.); fundraising; recruiting; doxxing of U.K.-based anti-fascist activists; promotion of the Proud Boys chapters in the United States and overseas; support for the Proud Boys members facing legal action for their involvement on January 6; promotion of and alignment with other Telegram channels espousing similar views; and explicit calls for violence.*

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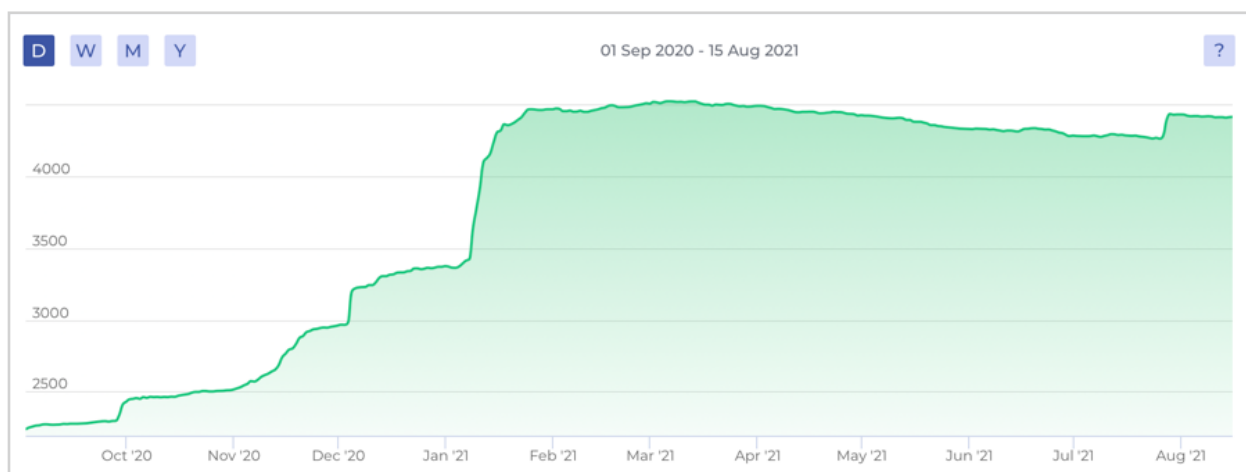
<sup>58</sup> Macfarlane, Scott. (@MacFarlaneNews). "Prosecutors allege Copeland has made troubling social media posts and messages, including references to "bombing" and honoring Ashli Babbitt." Twitter, May 7, 2021, 12:14 PM. <https://twitter.com/MacFarlaneNews/status/1390716565348364288>.

<sup>59</sup> Bergengruen, Vera. "'Our First Martyr.' How Ashli Babbitt Is Being Turned Into a Far-Right Recruiting Tool." *Time*, January 10, 2021. <https://time.com/5928249/ashli-babbitt-capitol-extremism/>.

<sup>60</sup> "Proud Boys: Canada Labels Far-Right Group a Terrorist Entity." *BBC*, February 3, 2021. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-55923485>.

<sup>61</sup> Data gathering and analysis by The Soufan Center, supported by third-party analysis services, such as Telemetry. <https://telemetry.io/en/channels/1331707987-proudboysbritannia>.

*An expert working on deradicalization and prevention programs for adherents of the far-right in the U.K. noted in an interview with TSC experts that PB-B is known to distribute propaganda, such as posters and flyers, in several cities in the U.K.—including Manchester, Birmingham, and parts of London. The expert noted that, interestingly, the group seems to focus its propaganda efforts primarily in predominantly white middle-class neighborhoods, rather than working-class areas.<sup>62</sup> Following the January 6 insurrection, the administrators of the channel affiliated with PB-B quickly capitalized on the event and influx of new subscribers to fundraise, primarily by selling merchandise in the forms of PB-B pins.*



*Subscribers to Proud Boys U.K.-affiliated Telegram channel (Source: Telemetrio, accessed August 2021)*

*Interestingly, as early as February 2021, the channel started featuring PB-B merchandise that had arrived at different Proud Boys chapters in the U.S., which suggests some form of coordination, contact, and potential financial ties or exchange between PB-B and these U.S.-based chapters of the organization, highlighting ideological and financial linkages. For example, on February 5, 2021, the channel re-shared a post from a channel associated with the Proud Boys Alabama chapter depicting PB-B pins and stickers. The post read: "Shout out to my Boahs in the UK! POYB!"<sup>63</sup> Indeed, analysis of the PB-B-affiliated channel suggests that PB-B merchandise may have been arriving in the U.S. since at least August 2019. By September 2020, reports suggest that PB-B had shipped at least 250 shirts to Proud Boys chapters in the U.S. and Canada.<sup>64</sup> This trend has continued in 2021, and more PB-B merchandise has seemingly arrived on American soil, including in Arizona, Maryland, and New Jersey. PB-B has also posted content in support of U.S. members facing legal charges for their*

<sup>62</sup> Author interview with United Kingdom deradicalization program coordinator, August 3, 2021.

<sup>63</sup> "Proud of Your Boy" – a saying associated with members of the Proud Boys.

<sup>64</sup> Jarvis, Jacob. "Proud Boys in UK Buying Fred Perry Polo Shirts to Ship to U.S." *Newsweek*, September 30, 2020. <https://www.newsweek.com/proud-boys-uk-ship-fred-perry-polo-us-1535257>.

*involvement on January 6. For example, on February 4, 2021, the channel posted content that urged followers to help the “living legend” Ethan Nordean, aka Rufio Panaman, who is “facing charges from the Federal government.” The post continued by celebrating previous violence committed by Nordean against an Antifa<sup>65</sup> member in Portland in 2018.<sup>66</sup>*

*While little publicly available information exists on exactly how funds are used by the Proud Boys, it is likely that they are allocated toward a range of organizational needs such as travel, equipment, weapons, and medical and legal fees, among other costs.<sup>67</sup> Terrorism finance researcher and expert Jessica Davis noted: “Merchandise sales and donations are critical aspects of Proud Boys’ financing and remains a viable source of funds for the group.”<sup>68</sup> It is thus interesting to see evidence of these financing tactics present online among international “chapters” of the group, like PB-B. With a strong ideological link, shared objectives, and given the lack of restrictions on the Proud Boys in the U.S., in the absence of a terrorist designation or proscription, it may also be possible that international “chapters” become increasingly reliant on the U.S. organization for financial and operational support.*

*In the month following January 6, the PB-B-affiliated Telegram channel continued the previously observed trend of promoting other Proud Boys chapters and channels, both overseas and in the United States. Perhaps unsurprisingly, according to TSC data gathering and analysis, PB-B primarily promoted Proud Boys chapters in the U.S. as compared to other countries; between January 6 and February 6, 2021, over 140 posts shared on the channel promoted or re-shared content from channels affiliated with Proud Boys chapters in the United States. Comparatively, for the same time period, around 25 posts promoted or re-shared content from channels affiliated with Proud Boys chapters in other countries, including Ireland, Norway, Australia, Germany, and Portugal. Of those, Proud Boys Ireland was over-represented (over 40% of posts). Against the background of a global pandemic and responses including lockdowns and travel restrictions, it remains unclear whether these online “chapters” are truly representative of groups with shared objectives and ideas or if they are indicative of stronger potential partnerships in a post-COVID environment.*

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<sup>65</sup> “Antifa” is short for anti-fascist; a left-wing, anti-racist, and highly decentralized political movement.

<sup>66</sup> Post on Proud Boys United Kingdom chapter-affiliated Telegram Channel, February 4, 2021. Screenshot captured on June 16, 2021.

<sup>67</sup> See for example: Amy Brittain and David Willman, “‘A Place to Fund Hope’: How Proud Boys and Other Fringe Groups Found Refuge on a Christian Fundraising Website,” *Washington Post*, January 18, 2021, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/a-place-to-fund-hope-how-proud-boys-and-other-fringe-groups-found-refuge-on-a-christian-fundraising-website/2021/01/18/14a536ee-574b-11eb-a08b-f1381ef3d207\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/a-place-to-fund-hope-how-proud-boys-and-other-fringe-groups-found-refuge-on-a-christian-fundraising-website/2021/01/18/14a536ee-574b-11eb-a08b-f1381ef3d207_story.html); and Davis, Jessica. “Proud Boys Financing.” Substack newsletter, *Insight Intelligence*. June 10, 2021. <https://insightintel.substack.com/p/proud-boys-financing>.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

*While researchers must remain vigilant against drawing definitive conclusions about the real-world impact of online activity in the Proud Boys'-affiliated chat groups, and the size of online chat forums versus real membership numbers, there is evidence of offline activity among both U.S. and international Proud Boys chapters. Of note, several U.S. state chapters promoted by PB-B have been engaged in offline activity in 2021, including participating in protests at schools over curriculum changes and mask mandates—some of which resulted in closure of schools over fears of violence and threats against school officials.<sup>69</sup> This case study illustrates the potential for transnational ideological connections to form out of the groundwork laid by formal extremist organizations like the Proud Boys, which can lead to greater financial and operational linkages that allow them to call on support and recruits from across borders.*

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### *Looking to the U.S. Threat Ahead*

Historical analysis suggests that the far-right extremist movement has fluctuated in importance as a threat in the United States. One of the more recent developments to note, however, is its globalization. Previously considered more of a nationalistic movement and confined to issues within the physical borders of the United States, the ideologies, causes, and supporters connected to violent far-right extremism now transcend countries. While this has historically been the case to varying degrees, the current level of global connections has been strengthened by the ability to travel and communicate seamlessly across borders. From Norway to New Zealand, extremists have formed transnational networks to recruit new members, finance their organizations, and disseminate propaganda. The trans-nationalization of the movement, especially as it relates to the white supremacy extremist movement, was outlined in detail in The Soufan Center's 2019 report.<sup>70</sup> Since then, this trend has been further reinforced by emerging technologies and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Long focused on combating international terrorist groups like al-Qaeda and the so-called Islamic State, Western countries have been slow to respond to the threat posed by domestic terrorism and extremism. In the United States, domestic laws and politics constrain law enforcement by limiting

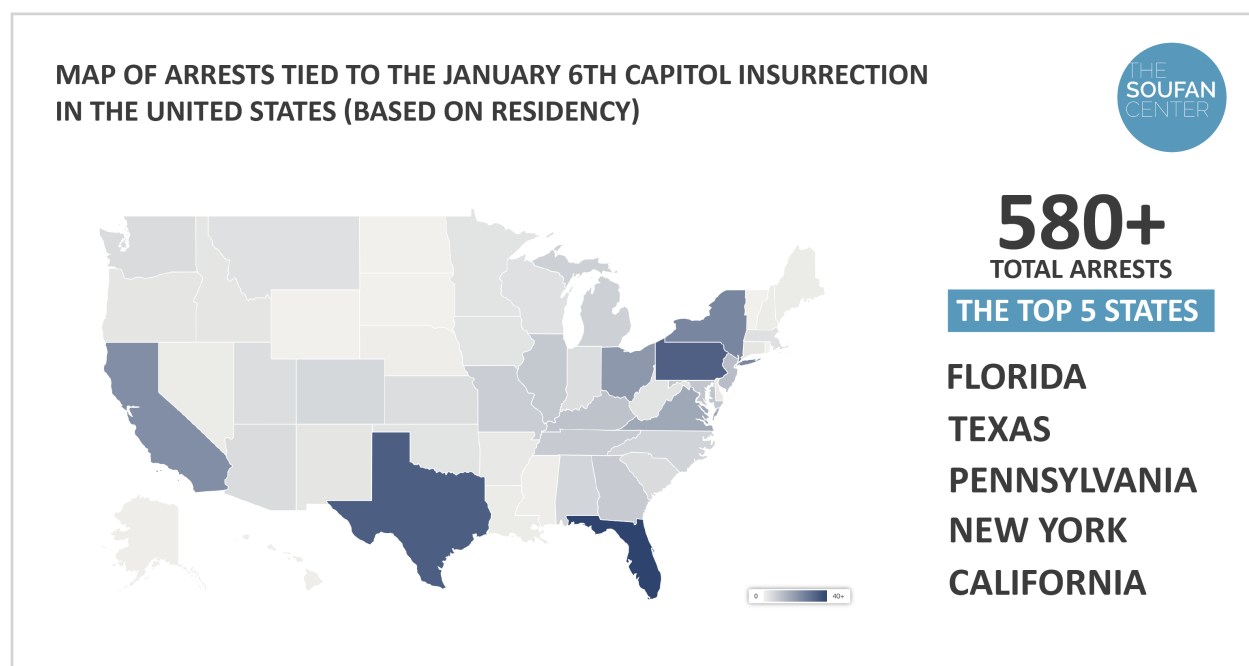
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<sup>69</sup> Balevic, Katie. "3 Washington Schools Went into Lockdown after Far-Right Anti-Mask Protestors Tried to Access Property." *Insider*, September 4, 2021. <https://www.insider.com/three-washington-schools-lockdown-proud-boys-protest-masks-enter-schools-2021-9>.

<sup>70</sup> "White Supremacy Extremism: The Transnational Rise of the Violent White Supremacist Movement." *The Soufan Center*, September 27, 2019. <https://thesoufancenter.org/research/white-supremacy-extremism-the-transnational-rise-of-the-violent-white-supremacist-movement/>.

tools and resources. According to a retired FBI agent who spent his career working on domestic terrorism issues, “In the U.S. there needs to be a legal framework [for domestic terrorism] so that everyone can work it for what it is, domestic terrorism. Sadly, such a legal framework is not likely, because both [political] sides are protecting their extremes. Meanwhile, the U.K. and other European countries have lived through this before and that’s why they have stronger legislation.”<sup>71</sup>

**Figure 2: Map of Arrests Tied to the January 6th Capitol Insurrection in the United States**



Technology and social media companies have also struggled to respond effectively to violent far-right propaganda online, including the proliferation of manifestos and the glorification of terrorists. The rising threat has called for more aggressive and interventionist approaches by Big Tech companies like Twitter, Google, YouTube, and Facebook, among others, but in the United States, these must be strictly in compliance with Constitutional protections of free speech to withstand legal scrutiny. The Christchurch Call to Eliminate Terrorist and Violent Extremist Content Online, established under the leadership of New Zealand and France after the horrific attacks against the Muslim community in Christchurch on March 15, 2019, provides one important platform for joint international efforts to develop research and responses that can be tailored to different legal and political contexts. In May 2021, the United States eventually joined the Christchurch Call, which counts among its supporters states as diverse as the United Kingdom, Kenya, Lithuania, the Maldives

<sup>71</sup> Interview, O'Connor, June 23, 2021.

and Japan, among others. It is important that U.S. law enforcement and the intelligence community work with partners and allies to understand the broader implications of the January 6 attack on the domestic violent extremist movement and its transnational ties.

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## THE VIOLENT FAR-RIGHT LANDSCAPE IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

In 2021, the United Kingdom faces a multitude of terrorist threats. According to national assessments and experts, violent Islamist groups still pose the most significant terrorist threat.<sup>72</sup> However, there has been a notable increase in extreme-right terrorism and the growth of white supremacy extremism throughout the country.<sup>73</sup> The accelerated trends in terms of connectivity and mobility offered by the internet, more frequent travel and communications, and catalyzing events such as the COVID-19 pandemic and January 6 insurrection suggest that it will be important to watch for greater convergence between violent far-right ecosystems on both sides of the Atlantic. The security services in the U.K. are concerned about the ever-present threat of Islamist terrorism, and now far-right violent extremism has been flagged as one of the most pressing contemporary security threats in the country. It poses a particular threat to young people, with nearly 83% of under-18s who were arrested for terrorism in 2019 linked to extreme right-wing ideology, said Neil Basu, Metropolitan Police Assistant Commissioner.<sup>74</sup> One of the interviewees for this paper, a retired senior U.K. intelligence official, noted, “nothing ever falls off the plate,” suggesting that new threats percolate as old threats persist and evolve.<sup>75</sup>

The threat landscape in the United Kingdom has evolved considerably over the past several decades. In the 1980s and 1990s, the U.K. was primarily concerned with terrorism perpetrated by ethno-nationalist groups like the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA). But after the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, violence ebbed between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, allowing the security services to focus on new and emerging threats. In April 1999, a bombing campaign by far-right extremist David Copeland was a reminder that the U.K. still faced a diverse threat landscape and foreshadowed the current environment in some ways. Yet, soon after, the threat posed by al-Qaeda and Salafi-jihadists surged to the forefront of security concerns, and in July 2005, several

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<sup>72</sup> Interview with Ed Butler, Chief Resilience Officer, Pool Reinsurance, May 2021.

<sup>73</sup> Macklin, Graham. “The Evolution of Extreme-Right Terrorism and Efforts to Counter It in the United Kingdom,” *CTC Sentinel*, January 2019, 12(1). <https://ctc.usma.edu/evolution-extreme-right-terrorism-efforts-counter-united-kingdom/>.

<sup>74</sup> White, Mark. “Right-wing extremism is UK’s fastest growing threat, says top counter-terror cop.” *Sky News*, November 18, 2020. <https://news.sky.com/story/right-wing-extremism-fastest-growing-threat-says-uks-top-cop-in-counter-terrorism-12135071>.

<sup>75</sup> Interview, Butler, May 2021.

British jihadists inspired by al-Qaeda launched deadly attacks throughout London. The July 2005 bombings had a long-term impact on the threat perception and preparedness planning in London, which combined with years of experience dealing with many forms of terrorism, has caused the U.K. to develop a multifaceted security response.

There is a sordid history of far-right extremism in the U.K., with some scholars choosing to reference Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists (BUF) in 1932 as the starting point, or focus on the role of the National Front, which was founded in the mid-to-late 1960s, as the period when the movement emerged in earnest.<sup>76</sup> Others looking more recently might point to the formation of the British National Party (BNP), formed in 1982 by John Tyndall, who split from the National Front and resurrected the name of a defunct British far-right party that operated between 1960 and 1967. The BNP and the National Front are considered among the ideological forebears of groups like Combat 18 and Blood & Honour, the dangerous neo-Nazi organization that emerged from the toxic combination of neo-Nazi skinhead culture and British football hooliganism.<sup>77</sup> After the death of Blood & Honour's founder Ian Stuart Donaldson in 1993, a power struggle ensued between Blood & Honour members and individuals from Combat 18, a split that originated in England but soon spread to North America.<sup>78</sup> Combat 18 was, for much of the late 1990s and early 2000s, the highest-profile white supremacy extremism terror organization in the British Isles.<sup>79</sup> Combat 18 is now largely defunct, but during its tenure it considered itself a global organization, with the group's propaganda stating:

"Our National Socialist family now transcends national borders, we do not owe our allegiance to any nation, our only allegiance is to our race—The White Race. Our countries are just geographical areas in which we just happen to live, but our race knows no national boundaries in this eternal struggle."<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> For more on the history of far-right extremism in the U.K., see: Macklin, Graham. *Failed Führers: A History of Britain's Extreme Right*. Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2020.

<sup>77</sup> "What Happened to Combat 18 after the '95 Landsdowne Road Riot?" *Newstalk*, May 27, 2013. <https://www.newstalk.com/news/what-happened-to-combat-18-after-the-95-landsdowne-road-riot-728506>; for a history of the emergence of Combat 18 in the U.K., see: Nick Lowles, *White Riot: The Violent Story of Combat 18*. Milo Books, 2001.

<sup>78</sup> Meleagrou-Hitchens, Alexander and Edmund Standing. "Blood & Honour: Britain's Far-Right Militants." *The Centre for Social Cohesion*, 2010. <http://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/BLOOD-AND-HNOUR.pdf>.

<sup>79</sup> "'We're at War and If That Means More Bombs, So Be It...'" *The Guardian*, April 27, 1999. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/1999/apr/27/uksecurity>.

<sup>80</sup> Perry, Barbara and Ryan Scrivens. "White Pride Worldwide: Constructing Global Identities Online," in Jennifer Schweppe and Mark Austin Walters, *The Globalization of Hate: Internationalizing Hate Crime?* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, 73–74.

Describing many of the activities of the group, a former member expressed surprise that they had never been proscribed in the United Kingdom.<sup>81</sup>

Combat 18 was banned in Canada in 2019 and Germany in 2020.<sup>82</sup> The organization was tied to a string of attacks and established cells in numerous other European countries, with perhaps its most prominent branch operating in Germany.<sup>83</sup> Although Combat 18 was significantly degraded due to law enforcement infiltration, it remained robust enough to make widespread transnational connections through underground channels.<sup>84</sup> As with many other racist skinhead groups, the white power music scene played a major role in allowing the group to further its messages of a declining working class fueled by “third-world” immigrants.<sup>85</sup> Prior to 2010, the far-right was primarily motivated by “crude biological racism, anti-Semitism, and...hostility toward liberal parliamentary democracy,” yet over the past decade has expanded to focus on “anti-immigration, nationalism, and anti-establishment populism.”<sup>86</sup> As Blood & Honour in the U.K. is largely considered an ageing scene, the group’s propaganda continues to remain firmly rooted in older modes of far-right expression, and is far less active online than contemporary far-right extremist groups.

In addition to Combat 18, the BNP spawned other progeny, including Britain First, a fascist political organization founded in 2011, and National Action (NA), a violent white supremacist group founded in 2013, which redefined far-right violent extremism in the U.K.<sup>87</sup> Once among the most prominent radical street movements to emerge in Europe over the past decade, today the English Defense League (EDL) is a weak and divided organization. Founded and led, at least for a time, by Tommy Robinson, a former member of the BNP, the EDL successfully blended Islamophobia, far-right politics, and nativist grievances.<sup>88</sup> The EDL mobilized supporters to take part in marches and other

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<sup>81</sup> Interview, Bromage, August 2021.

<sup>82</sup> Besser, Linton and Roscoe Whalan. “Neo-Nazi Groups Banned in Canada and Europe Set Sights on Australia.” *ABC News Australia*, March 28, 2021. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-03-28/banned-neo-nazi-groups-set-sights-on-australia/100030072>.

<sup>83</sup> Knight, Ben. “Combat 18: The Neo-Nazi Network Facing a Ban in Germany.” *DW*, July 5, 2019. <https://www.dw.com/en/combat-18-the-neo-nazi-network-facing-a-ban-in-germany/a-49493000>.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Cotter, John M. “Sounds of Hate: White Power Rock and Roll and the Neo-Nazi Skinhead Subculture.” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 1999, 11(2), 117–118. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546559908427509>.

<sup>86</sup> Goodwin, Matthew J. and James Dennison. “The Radical Right in the United Kingdom,” in Jens Rydgren, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018, 521.

<sup>87</sup> Allen, Chris. “Proscribing National Action: Considering the Impact of Banning the British Far-Right Group.” *The Political Quarterly*, October-December 2017, 88(4), 653. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-923X.12368>.

<sup>88</sup> Alessio, Dominic and Kristen Meredith, “Blackshirts for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century? Fascism and the English Defense League.” *Social Identities*, 2014, 20(1), 104-118, 107. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504630.2013.843058>.

public demonstrations, primarily to intimidate British Muslims.<sup>89</sup> The main objective of many of these protests, and in some cases counterprotests, was to antagonize political opponents and instill fear in the U.K.'s Muslim community, with rallies often ending in street brawls and violence.<sup>90</sup> The EDL has also been largely associated with trying to stir up racist violence in the context of football clubs, not only in England, but also across Europe.<sup>91</sup>

The potency of racism to fuel far-right sentiment and violence was demonstrated during the summer 2021 loss of the England football team to Italy during the UEFA European championship, when three of the team's young Black players were subjected to torrents of racist messaging on social media and violence broke out in London's Wembley Stadium following the game. This prompted a strong response from the Football Association, England team and several senior government officials. Twitter reportedly removed at least 1,000 racist posts and permanently deleted several accounts and there was widespread public support expressed for the players and challenging racism, highlighting the importance of robust government and community responses.<sup>92</sup>

While in the past the United States might have looked to the United Kingdom for a sense of emerging trends in terrorism, at present, the situation is reversed. Many extremists in the U.K. are taking their cue from what is happening across the Atlantic. The emergence of Proud Boys Britannia in the U.K., as detailed above, and connections between British far-right extremists and the Atomwaffen Division, clearly demonstrate the current direction of the relationship.<sup>93</sup> Historically, this trend has been evident since the 1950s and continued to evolve over time and during the 1980s and 1990s, particularly in relation to the influence of groups like William Pierce's National Alliance, one of the most notorious neo-Nazi organizations in the United States.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Pupcenoks, Juris and Ryan McCabe. "The Rise of the Fringe: Right Wing Populists, Islamists, and Politics in the UK." *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 2013, 33(2), 171-184, 176. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602004.2013.826451>.

<sup>90</sup> Bartlett, Jamie and Jonathan Birdwell, "Cumulative Radicalisation Between the Far-Right and Islamist Groups in the UK: A Review of Evidence." *Demos*, November 5, 2013, 4.; see also: Wilding, Mark. "The Rise and Demise of the EDL." *VICE News*, March 12, 2018. <https://www.vice.com/en/article/qve8wm/the-rise-and-demise-of-the-edl>.

<sup>91</sup> Phillips, Leigh. "Football Hooligans to Launch 'European Defence League' in Amsterdam." *EU Observer*, August 31, 2010. <https://euobserver.com/news/30691>.

<sup>92</sup> See for example: "FA condemns racist abuse of players after England's Euro 2020 final loss." *BBC*, July 12, 2021. <https://www.reuters.com/lifestyle/sports/fa-condemns-racist-abuse-players-following-englands-final-loss-2021-07-12/>; Wolfe-Robinson, Maya. "Manchester shows support for Marcus Rashford: 'It's evolved into something special'." *Guardian*, July 13, 2021. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/jul/13/manchester-shows-support-for-marcus-rashford-its-evolved-into-something-special>.

<sup>93</sup> Evans, Hayley. "All You Need to Know About the U.K. Proscribing the Neo-Nazi Group Atomwaffen Division." *Lawfare*, May 17, 2021. <https://www.lawfareblog.com/all-you-need-know-about-uk-proscribing-neo-nazi-group-atomwaffen-division>.

<sup>94</sup> "National Alliance." *Southern Poverty Law Center*. <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/national-alliance>.



Unidentified members of the extreme far right group the English Defense League as an English flag is blown over one man's face, during a protest outside the Houses of Parliament in London in October 2012. (Credit: AP Photo/Matt Dunham, FILE)

### *Global Dimensions of the Violent Far-Right*

One of the defining events of the last decade related to far-right terrorism did not occur in the United Kingdom, but in Oslo and Utøya, Norway, on July 22, 2011. Anders Breivik launched a campaign of terror that resulted in eight deaths in a bombing in Oslo and an additional 69 deaths—most of whom were minors gunned down at point blank range—in a mass shooting on the island of Utøya during a youth-oriented camp run by the Labour party.<sup>95</sup> Breivik, who specifically targeted Labour party youth because of his ideological beliefs that they represented a future generation of potential “traitors,” set out his ideas in a lengthy manifesto heavily colored by Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, and racism, and has since become an icon for far-right violent extremists.<sup>96</sup> In June 2011, roughly a month before the Breivik attack, U.K. authorities began investing more resources in the prevention of right-wing extremism. Largely as a result of the rise of the EDL, authorities released

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<sup>95</sup> Ravndal, Jacob Aasland. “A Post-Trial Profile of Anders Behring Breivik.” *CTC Sentinel*, October 2012, 4(10). <https://ctc.usma.edu/a-post-trial-profile-of-anders-behring-breivik/>; “22 July Commission Report: Recommendations.” *Famous Trials*, August 13, 2021. <https://famous-trials.com/breivik/2578-22-july-gjorv-commission-report-summary-in-english>.

<sup>96</sup> Clarke, Colin P. “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>.

the Prevent Strategy Review which, for the first time, included “all forms of extremism” with an emphasis on right wing extremism.<sup>97</sup>

Following the Breivik attack, authorities in the United Kingdom further heightened awareness of and attention to threats emanating from the far-right. Accordingly, British authorities further empowered the National Domestic Extremism and Disorder Intelligence Unit (NDEDIU, formerly the National Domestic Extremism Unit and before that, the National Coordinator for Domestic Extremism) by allocating more resources and manpower to deal with the threat.<sup>98</sup> The NDEDIU is a national police unit that works to combat extremism in British society, including acts of terrorism motivated by extremist ideologies. It is embedded within the Metropolitan Police Service Specialist Operations Group.

Although the EDL has been weakened by defections and arrests, it continues to serve as a model for other far-right violent extremists abroad.<sup>99</sup> Indeed, the Australian Defense League is but one of several movements inspired by the EDL and adhering to virulent anti-Muslim propaganda.<sup>100</sup> Darren Osborne, who drove his van into a crowd of worshipers outside a mosque in London’s Finsbury Park in June 2017, had engaged with materials published by the EDL and British radical-right party Britain First, as noted by prosecutors at his trial.<sup>101</sup> Osborne was motivated by his hatred of Muslims and was ultimately charged with terrorism-related murder and attempted murder, found guilty of both counts, and sentenced to life in prison.<sup>102</sup> It is believed that a significant motivation for his hatred of Muslims stemmed from mainstream BBC dramatizations about child exploitation cases in the U.K.,

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<sup>97</sup>“Prevent Strategy.” HM Government, June 2011. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/97976/prevent-strategy-review.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97976/prevent-strategy-review.pdf); for more, see: McCann, Craig J.J. *The Prevent Strategy and Right-wing Extremism*

*A Case Study of the English Defence League*. Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2019.

<sup>98</sup> Macklin, Graham. “Only Bullets will Stop Us! – The Banning of National Action in Britain,” *Perspectives on Terrorism*, December 2018, 12(6), 104-122.

<sup>99</sup> Collins, Matthew. “The collapse of the BNP and EDL has made the far right deadlier.” *Guardian*, March 2, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/mar/02/collapse-bnp-edl-far-right-terrorists>.

<sup>100</sup> Flemming, Andy and Aurelien Mondon. “The Radical Right in Australia” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right*, Jens Rydgren ed. Oxford: New York, 650-666. Pp. 660.; Alesso, Dominic and Kristen Meredith. “Blackshirts for the twenty-first century? Fascism and the English Defence League.” *Social Identities*, 20(1) 2014. 104-118, 107. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504630.2013.843058>.

<sup>101</sup> Rawlinson, Kevin. “Darren Osborn jailed for life for Finsbury Park terrorist attack.” *Guardian*, February 2, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/feb/02/finsbury-park-attack-darren-osborne-jailed>.

<sup>102</sup> “Darren Osborne Guilty of Finsbury Park Mosque Murder.” *BBC*, February 1, 2018. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-42910051>.

which involved “grooming” gangs of mostly Muslim men that preyed on non-Muslim British teenagers.<sup>103</sup>

In an indication that the threat of far-right violent extremism in the United Kingdom would not remain a strictly domestic issue, the murder of Mohammed Saleem in April 2013 by Pavlo Lapshyn shed some light on the transnational dimensions of the ideology.<sup>104</sup> Lapshyn was a Ukrainian student who had only been residing in the U.K. for less than a week before he decided to stab and kill an 82-year-old Muslim man named Mohammed Saleem. Lapshyn then embarked on a bombing spree in the summer of 2013, targeting three separate mosques. After he was apprehended and questioned, Lapshyn admitted to authorities that he was motivated by racism.<sup>105</sup> Lapshyn was charged under Section 5 of the Terrorism Act 2006 with intending to commit acts of terrorism.<sup>106</sup> At his sentencing, Mr. Justice Sweeney told Lapshyn, “You clearly hold extremist right-wing, white supremacist views and you were motivated to commit the offenses by religious and racial hatred in the hope that you would ignite racial conflict and cause Muslims to leave the area where you were living.”<sup>107</sup>

The same year as the Lapshyn terror attack, the dynamics of the far-right were changing in the U.K. The BNP had imploded electorally in 2010 and by 2013, the English Defense League was also on the decline. As these organizations were ebbing, a new group named National Action (NA) sprang up, created by Ben Raymond and Alex Davies, young right-wing extremists who met online through their association with the Integralist Party of Great Britain (IP).<sup>108</sup> Other NA members were recruited on 4chan.net, and Raymond became an active administrator on IronMarch.org (IM), a far-right violent

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<sup>103</sup> Crew, Jemma and Sally Wardle. “Finsbury Park mosque attack: Driver who ran over worshippers 'brainwashed' by TV sex gang drama, court hears.” *Independent*, January 23, 2018. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/finsbury-park-mosque-attack-latest-darren-osborne-brainwashed-three-girls-tv-drama-rochdale-grooming-gang-muslims-islamophobia-a8173546.html>.

<sup>104</sup> Pantucci, Raffaello. “From Ukraine with Hate: What Pavlo Lapshyn Conviction Says About Far-Right Extremism.” *Royal United Services Institute*, October 25, 2013. <https://rusi.org/commentary/ukraine-hate-what-pavlo-lapshyn-conviction-says-about-far-right-extremism>.

<sup>105</sup> Dodd, Vikram. “Pavlo Lapshyn: The ‘Shy and Polite’ Student Turned Terrorist.” *Guardian*, October 21, 2013. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2013/oct/21/pavlo-lapshyn-ukrainian-student-terrorist>.

<sup>106</sup> “Ukrainian in Court on Terror and Murder Charges.” *BBC*, July 23, 2013. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-birmingham-23419077>.

<sup>107</sup> “Mosque Bomber Pavlo Lapshyn Given Life for Murder.” *BBC*, October 25, 2013. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-birmingham-24675040>.

<sup>108</sup> Macklin, Graham. ““Only Bullets will Stop Us! – The Banning of National Action in Britain.” *Perspectives on Terrorism*, December 2018, 12(6), 104-122.

extremist site that, according to extremist expert Graham Macklin, “became an increasingly important transatlantic outlet for violent activism.”<sup>109</sup>

In terms of ideological linkages, the British far-right has long looked to the United States for inspiration, drawing intellectual support and inspiration from American white nationalist William Pierce and his novel *The Turner Diaries*, for example. Nigel Bromage described how, in his time in Combat 18, he used to order far-right books and materials and call members of neo-Nazi groups and the Ku Klux Klan for support and guidance, although the KKK in particular has historically failed to achieve significant resonance in the U.K.<sup>110</sup> Beyond that, far-right groups in the U.K. have sought opportunities to expand internationally. In particular, members of the British far-right have looked to Greece and emulated Golden Dawn, a Greek neo-Nazi party whose electoral success has ebbed and flowed over the years.<sup>111</sup> But it was the formation, evolution, and proscription of NA (described in more detail below) that served as perhaps the most defining moment in the evolution of far-right violent extremism in the U.K. over the past seven years. The group’s transformation and transnational connections could be a harbinger of what to expect globally, as other groups emulate NA, and new groups emerge, splinter, and evolve.

There are numerous transnational connections between British far-right extremists and extremists abroad. In August 2014, National Action members undertook outdoor physical training exercises in the Brecon Beacons, a mountain range in Wales. The training was organized jointly by *Sigurd Legion*, the physical culture group led by fitness trainer Craig Fraser; *White Rex*, the Russian mixed martial arts organization led by notorious Russian far-right extremist and mixed martial arts aficionado Denis Nikitin; and the *Western Spring* blog.<sup>112</sup> In an example of how close-knit these networks can be, Nikitin has been linked at various points to Robert Rundo, an American who founded the Rise Above Movement (RAM) and is highly active in global far-right circles.<sup>113</sup> Fraser, for his part, appeared at an event in the U.K. in September 2014 with Finnish far-right member Kai Murros, where both extremists expressed admiration for Salafi-jihadists. While Croatia, Serbia, and later,

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Interview, Bromage, August 2021.

<sup>111</sup> Macklin, Graham. “The BNP and Golden Dawn” in Nigel Copsey and Matthew Worley, eds., *Tomorrow Belongs to Us*. Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2018, 185-207.

<sup>112</sup> Macklin, Graham. ““Only Bullets will Stop Us! – The Banning of National Action in Britain.” *Perspectives on Terrorism*, December 2018, 12(6), 104-122; Musson, Max. “Culture Camp 2014.” *Western Spring*, August 25, 2014. <http://www.westernspring.co.uk/culture-camp-2014/>.

<sup>113</sup> Colborne, Michael. “Friday Night Fights With Ukraine’s Far Right.” *New Republic*, July 9, 2019. <https://newrepublic.com/article/154434/friday-night-fights-ukraines-far-right>; Thompson, A.C. and Ali Winston. “American Hate Group Looks To Make Allies in Europe.” *ProPublica*, July 5, 2018. <https://www.propublica.org/article/robert-rundo-denis-nikitin-hooligans-europe-hate-group>.

Ukraine, have proved desirable destinations for training and far-right congregation, it appears the United States has also increased in influence, with groups like Atomwaffen and The Base proving increasingly inspirational to extreme far-right members.<sup>114</sup>

Britain's transnational far-right connections also include military veterans, a trend also apparent in the United States and other Western countries. Mikko Vehvilainen was a British soldier of Finnish descent who served in Afghanistan and was in contact with Pohjoismaiden vastarintaliike (PVL)—the Finnish branch of the Nordic Resistance Movement—and active in NA Telegram groups.<sup>115</sup> When Vehvilainen was arrested for his membership in a neo-Nazi terrorist group, he told his wife that it was because he was a “patriot.”<sup>116</sup> During a search of his belongings, police found Nazi flags and the Breivik manifesto.<sup>117</sup> Ben Raymond and other NA members established relationships with far-right violent extremists throughout Europe, including in Germany, the Baltics, and Scandinavia. NA had connections to PVL, the Azov Battalion<sup>118</sup>, and members of AWD before the group's formal founding. Further connections were made after NA was banned, first through the System Resistance Network (SRN) and later through the Sonnenkrieg Division (SKD).<sup>119</sup>

Another brutal far-right violent extremist attack occurred in January 2015, when a 25-year-old white supremacist named Zack Davies attacked Dr. Sarandev Bhambra, a 24-year-old Sikh dentist, nearly severing his hand as he sought to protect his head.<sup>120</sup> Davies claimed that he attempted to kill Bhambra because he was South Asian.<sup>121</sup> Davies was found with a National Action flag at the time of the attempted murder and claimed to be a member of National Action; the group's co-founder Ben Raymond denied that he was. Claiming to be pursuing revenge for the murder of Lee Rigby, a British Fusilier who was murdered in a jihadist-inspired attack in May 2013, Davies was sentenced to

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<sup>114</sup> Interview, Bromage, August 2021.

<sup>115</sup> Macklin, Graham. “The Evolution of Extreme-Right Terrorism and Efforts to Counter It in the United Kingdom.” *CTC Sentinel*, January 2019, 12(1). <https://ctc.usma.edu/evolution-extreme-right-terrorism-efforts-counter-united-kingdom/>.

<sup>116</sup> Dearden, Lizzie. “British Army Lance Corporal Was Recruiting Soldiers for the Neo-Nazi Terrorist Group.” *Independent*, November 13, 2018. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/british-army-officer-national-action-mikko-vehvilainen-neo-nazi-terrorist-group-recruitment-a8632331.html>.

<sup>117</sup> Gallagher, Ryan. “British Neo-Nazis are on the Rise – and They’re Becoming More Organized and Violent.” *The Intercept*, May 3, 2018. <https://theintercept.com/2018/05/03/uk-far-right-terrorism-national-action/>.

<sup>118</sup> The “White Man March” in Newcastle, U.K. in March 2015 was notable for the presence of an alleged recruiter for the Azov Brigade.

<sup>119</sup> Macklin, Graham. “The Evolution of Extreme-Right Terrorism and Efforts to Counter It in the United Kingdom.” *CTC Sentinel*, January 2019, 12(1). <https://ctc.usma.edu/evolution-extreme-right-terrorism-efforts-counter-united-kingdom/>.

<sup>120</sup> Whelan, Brian. “National Action’s Zack Davies Guilty of Attempted Murder.” *Channel 4*, June 25, 2015. <https://www.channel4.com/news/national-actions-zack-davies-guilty-of-attempted-murder>.

<sup>121</sup> Lowe, David. “Prevent Strategies: The Problems Associated in Defining Extremism: The Case of the United Kingdom.” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 2017, 40(11), 917-933. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2016.1253941>.

life in prison for the attack. This attack is also noteworthy as a possible example of reciprocal radicalization<sup>122</sup>, a phenomenon where extremist groups feeding off one another's rhetoric and actions leads to a tit-for-tat cycle of escalation.<sup>123</sup>

For far-right violent extremists in the United Kingdom, jihadis are both sources of grievances that can lead to further attacks, as well as sources of emulation to improve tactics, techniques, and procedures. During his trial, Davies spoke of his fascination with Islamic State executioner "Jihadi John," who became an inspiration for him.<sup>124</sup> This is far from the only instance of far-right violent extremists fetishizing jihadists. NA talked about "white jihad," though mostly as a means of gaining media attention. Ex-BNP leader Nick Griffin was interested in al-Qaeda's *Inspire* magazine as a source of learning, commenting that its self-radicalization model was worth emulating and tailoring for the white supremacist milieu.<sup>125</sup> It is not only tactical and operational instructions and materials that are proving instructive to far-right groups. Nigel Bromage described a practice whereby far-right extremist groups require new recruits to film a video describing their beliefs and skillsets to contribute and goals for the movement.

The June 2016 murder of Jo Cox, a British member of parliament (MP) from the Labour Party, by a white supremacist named Thomas Mair, placed the issue of far-right violent extremism front and center in the United Kingdom. Mair was a lone actor and not a member of a specific group or organization per se, but he was apparently enamored with Pierce's neo-Nazi political organization, National Alliance.<sup>126</sup> Mair even purchased publications from NA in the United States, including "how-to" guides on bombmaking.<sup>127</sup> The Cox murder was a major turning point in the U.K., reinforcing to law enforcement authorities who had been long focused on the threat posed by jihadist groups, that far-right violent extremism was an issue that could no longer be relegated to the sidelines of the counterterrorism debate.

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<sup>122</sup> See also: "Counter-Extremism Strategy." HM Government, October 2015. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/470088/51859\\_Cm9148\\_Accessible.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/470088/51859_Cm9148_Accessible.pdf).

<sup>123</sup> Knott, Kim, Simon Copeland, and Benjamin Lee. "Reciprocal Radicalisation." *CREST Research*, September 3, 2018. <https://crestresearch.ac.uk/resources/reciprocal-radicalisation/>.

<sup>124</sup> "Lee Rigby Revenge Attacker Zack Davies Given Life Sentence." *BBC*, September 11, 2015. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-wales-north-east-wales-34218184>.

<sup>125</sup> De Simone, Daniel. "How Neo-Nazi Group National Action Targeted Young People." *BBC*, March 21, 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-48279225>.

<sup>126</sup> Cobain, Ian, Nazia Parveen, and Matthew Taylor. "The Slow Burning Hatred that Led Thomas Mair to Murder Jo Cox." *Guardian*, November 23, 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/nov/23/thomas-mair-slow-burning-hatred-led-to-jo-cox-murder>.

<sup>127</sup> "Alleged Killer of British MP was a Longtime Supporter of the Neo-Nazi National Alliance." *Southern Poverty Law Center*, June 16, 2016. <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2016/06/16/alleged-killer-british-mp-was-longtime-supporter-neo-nazi-national-alliance>.

As a result of the murder of Jo Cox, NA became the first far-right violent extremist group to be banned since 1940 and the first to be proscribed as a terrorist organization. On December 12, 2016, Home Secretary Amber Rudd announced that NA would be proscribed under section 3(3)(a) of the Terrorism Act (2000). The result was that any individual identified as being a member of NA, or inviting support for the group, would be eligible for a criminal offense of up to 10 years in prison. Rudd noted that the ban was put in place due to NA's continued online glorification of terrorism, and that proscription would help the U.K. government stymie the growth of NA's membership, prevent it from spreading propaganda, and help individuals who were at risk of or vulnerable to radicalization.<sup>128</sup> "National Action is a racist, antisemitic and homophobic organization which stirs up hatred, glorifies violence and promotes a vile ideology," noted Rudd.<sup>129</sup> Even though NA was never believed to number more than 100 members, its group was spread across the U.K., boasting the following regional organizations: NA Scotland; NA North East; NA Yorkshire; NA North West; NA Midlands; NA South West; NA London; and NA East Anglia.<sup>130</sup>

Dozens of NA members were arrested as a result of several members still proclaiming to be part of NA after the group was proscribed, when "membership" was a criminal offense. This development partially led to the splintering of the group and a move by several of its leaders to continue operating through more clandestine means. Splinter groups included Scottish Dawn and the National Socialist Anti-Capitalist Action (NS131), and NA co-founder Ben Raymond "allegedly envisaged the formation of a National Socialist Network (NSN)," which would serve as a highly decentralized node that connected far-right violent extremists, although it would not be a "specific entity" and as such, could skirt the NA ban.<sup>131</sup> NA leaders looked to British Islamist organization al-Muhajiroun as a model, since that organization was banned and subsequently embarked on a series of name changes in an attempt to stay ahead of the authorities. Al-Muhajiroun was formed with the help of Anjem Choudary, who has been convicted under the Terrorism Act (2000) for supporting terrorist groups like the so-called Islamic State and facilitating recruitment and mobilization, and is listed on the UN's 1267 counterterrorism sanctions regime.<sup>132</sup> In this sense, NA also hoped to

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<sup>128</sup> Macklin, Graham. "'Only Bullets will Stop Us! – The Banning of National Action in Britain.'" *Perspectives on Terrorism*, December 2018, 12(6), 104-122.

<sup>129</sup> Elgot, Jessica. "Neo-Nazi Group National Action Banned by UK Home Secretary." *Guardian*, December 12, 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/dec/12/neo-nazi-group-national-action-banned-by-uk-home-secretary>.

<sup>130</sup> Jackson, Paul. "Transnational Neo-Nazism in the USA, United Kingdom, and Australia." *George Washington University Program on Extremism*, February 2020, 5. <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Jackson%20-%20Transnational%20Neo%20Nazism%20in%20the%20USA%2C%20United%20Kingdom%20and%20Australia.pdf>.

<sup>131</sup> Macklin, Graham. "'Only Bullets will Stop Us! – The Banning of National Action in Britain.'" *Perspectives on Terrorism*, December 2018, 12(6), 104-122.

<sup>132</sup> "Security Council ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee Adds One Entry to Its Sanctions List." United Nations Press Release: SC/13539. October 15, 2018. <https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/sc13539.doc.htm>.

function similar to the Anti-Kapitalist Kollektiv, a decentralized network of neo-Nazis in Germany that brings autonomous supporters together, but lacks centralized leadership, membership, and organizational structure.<sup>133</sup>

**Figure 3: Far-Right Groups Proscribed as Terrorist Organizations in the United Kingdom**



Circumventing proscriptions is an important issue for many violent far-right extremist groups. The leader of NA's northwest branch, Christopher Lythgoe, was active in providing direction to the organization online while also operating a private gym for training far-right violent extremists. He weighed in with advice on how to mitigate the impact of proscription, including how to avoid detection and surveillance by British security services.<sup>134</sup> Still, Lythgoe himself was not adept at circumnavigating the ban, which eventually led to his arrest and eight-year prison sentence for his involvement with NA.<sup>135</sup> Comparing the organization to an arthropod, Lythgoe urged his fellow neo-Nazis to simply "shed one skin for another."<sup>136</sup> Jack Renshaw, a former Young BNP member who, during his trial for conspiring to murder Labour MP Rosie Cooper, was not convicted of NA

<sup>133</sup> Allen, Chris. "Proscribing National Action: Considering the Impact of Banning the British Far-Right Group." *The Political Quarterly*, October-December 2017, 88(4), 652-659, 658. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-923X.12368>; see also: Poulter, James. "Why Banning British Nazis is a Waste of Time." *VICE News*, November 29, 2016. <https://www.vice.com/en/article/9b8ja7/is-banning-neo-nazi-groups-actually-going-to-be-effective>.

<sup>134</sup> "Christopher Lythgoe." *Counter Extremism Project*. <https://www.counterextremism.com/extremists/christopher-lythgoe>.

<sup>135</sup> "National Action: Men Jailed for Being Members of Banned Neo-Nazi Group." *BBC*, July 18, 2018. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-44873178>.

<sup>136</sup> Khomami, Nadia. "Two Members of Banned Neo-Nazi Group National Action Jailed." *Guardian*, July 18, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/jul/18/neo-nazi-group-national-action-members-jailed>.

membership, still pled guilty to preparing an act of terrorism.<sup>137</sup> Alex Deakin, who served as the West Midlands NA leader, was responsible for creating a Telegram chat labeled “Triple KKK Mafia,” with nearly two dozen members who spoke of “race war” and committing acts of racially and ideologically motivated violence, including murder.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Macklin, Graham. ““Only Bullets will Stop Us! – The Banning of National Action in Britain.” *Perspectives on Terrorism*, December 2018, 12(6), 104-122.

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## TRANSATLANTIC CONNECTIONS

“Transnationally the XRW has always been connected; in Germany [the] KKK has been there since the 1920s; US [extremist] groups are creating chapters in Europe; the transnational element is nothing new, it’s built into the DNA of these organizations. The main shift is now in the audience; once US neo-Nazis used to do something to influence their own base; now it’s to influence transnational audiences via online platforms.”<sup>139</sup>

There are several factors that will determine the future of far-right violent extremism in the United Kingdom and the nature of its international linkages. Some will find ideological inspiration in the events of the January 6 Capitol insurrection in the United States, while others will be motivated by the propaganda consumed over the course of COVID-19-related lockdowns and quarantines. The growth of conspiracy theories, including the increasingly global reach of QAnon, will also likely play a role. In a poll from April 2020, more than one-fifth of individuals surveyed in the U.K. claimed to agree with the statement, “Coronavirus has been intentionally released as part of a ‘depopulation’ plan orchestrated by the UN or New World Order.”<sup>140</sup> A focus on the New World Order forges common cause between far-right extremists in the U.K. and the U.S. “New World Order theory played a central role in motivating many members to arm themselves and prepare for political violence,” observed journalist Mike Giglio following months of interviews with far-right extremists in the United States, including militia violent extremists.<sup>141</sup>

According to a British researcher who has studied far-right extremism for decades, “ideologically, the U.S. has had a major impact [on the U.K.] because the materials are in English and easily digestible. The U.S. far-right has survived for decades without having to engage electorally,” which has had an impact on groups like National Action, but also on those “who have fallen in love with Trump and the QAnon conspiracy.”<sup>142</sup> NA was also partly a response to the failure of the electoral strategy pursued by the BNP. An interview with a retired senior U.K. intelligence official also shed

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<sup>139</sup> Interview, Koehler, September 2021.

<sup>140</sup> Lowles, Nick. “State of Hate: Backlash, Conspiracies, & Confrontation.” *Hope Not Hate*, 2021. <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/state-of-hate-2021-final-2.pdf>.

<sup>141</sup> Giglio, Mike. “The Secret Source Who Helped Fuel Trump’s Big Lie.” *New Yorker*, July 28, 2021. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/american-chronicles/the-secret-source-who-helped-fuel-trumps-big-lie>.

<sup>142</sup> Author interview, Expert on far-right extremism, United Kingdom, June 2021.

light on the impact that the U.S. far-right could have on far-right extremism in the U.K., with the official noting, “the U.K. are quite often following suit in a lot of these, whether it’s economics, politics, or from a terrorism perspective, I think this type of direct action is only going to increase (in the UK).”<sup>143</sup>

In an interview with researchers from Moonshot, a technology company based in the United Kingdom and the United States focused on countering violent extremism—including studying dominant narratives and trends in far-right spaces online—they commented that on far-right forums and far-right audiences on social media, there was a high-level of discussion focusing on Trump’s claims about the election being “rigged.” U.K. audiences were highly engaged with U.S. content during this time, with “a clear uptick in interest in the U.S. election” and organic discussions emerging in the U.K. around accusations of voter fraud. There has been an adoption of similar terms and language, and the researchers observed high calls for violence, taking “action on the streets,” and anti-Semitic language around conspiracies related to election rigging, as well as an overlap with QAnon narratives as U.S. and U.K. QAnon supporters engaged with other aspects of the far-right in the U.K.<sup>144</sup> The QAnon conspiracy has spread abroad, taking root in the U.K., Canada, France, Norway, Germany, Iran, Japan, Russia, and elsewhere.<sup>145</sup> Conspiracy theorists peddling disinformation open up an entirely new threat vector when one considers that countries like China and Russia are actively amplifying QAnon social media accounts to sow division in the West.<sup>146</sup>

Fundraising remains a key aspect of far-right transnational linkages, and it will be important to see whether patterns of online interaction are increasingly reflected in offline spaces as COVID-19 related travel restrictions ease. While many far-right extremist groups have relied on self-financing their activities through their own “day” jobs, international linkages have also been forged through travel, shared experiences, and donations. As previously noted, the sale of far-right merchandise, particularly in the United States where free speech protections make it difficult to circumscribe such actions, forms one important source of revenue and connection. The Rise Above Movement’s *Our Fight Clothing Co.*, for example, is reportedly the U.S. sales point for many European far-right brands. Crowdfunding platforms like Patreon and Kickstarter have also provided important channels for far-right fundraising, though restrictions on hate speech and constraints on far-right activities

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<sup>143</sup> Interview, Senior U.K. intelligence official [Retired], May 2021

<sup>144</sup> Interview, Moonshot, June 2, 2021.

<sup>145</sup> “IntelBrief: QAnon – Gaining International Attention and Political Clout?” The Soufan Center, August 4, 2020. <https://thesoufancenter.org/intelbrief-qanon-gaining-international-attention-and-political-clout/>.

<sup>146</sup> “Special Report: Quantifying the Q Conspiracy: A Data-Driven Approach to Understanding the Threat Posed by QAnon.” *The Soufan Center*, April 2021. [https://thesoufancenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/TSC-White-Paper\\_QAnon\\_16April2021-final-1.pdf](https://thesoufancenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/TSC-White-Paper_QAnon_16April2021-final-1.pdf).

prompted some individuals, like the self-proclaimed “old school anarchist” Cody Wilson, to launch their own versions like *Hatreon* to host merchandise banned from mainstream sources. However, challenges with credit card processing firms ultimately led to the demise of the platform.<sup>147</sup>

Cryptocurrencies do not appear to play a significant role yet in the overall financial activities of the violent far-right movement, though this may change as licit and illicit activities adapt to emerging technologies and innovation. Some groups have already begun to use this technology, and the Bitcoin donation of \$500,000 from a French donor to the Capitol insurrectionists remains notable.<sup>148</sup> Some groups, however, continue to rely on more traditional offline methods; the Counter Extremism Project noted, for example, that groups in the United Kingdom relied not only on cash donations but also crime to fund their activities,<sup>149</sup> though definitive linkages between criminal and terrorist activities remains varied globally.

There are also overlaps between financial and operational linkages, as groups create opportunities to congregate, share ideas and expertise, and develop networks through large-scale events. These events include concerts, rallies, and sporting events such as mixed martial arts (MMA), to convene international supporters, prompting communities in some countries to stage their own forms of protests, such as making the venues unavailable to the groups.<sup>150</sup> As noted above, the Rise Above Movement has been proactive in this space, and its affinity for underground fight clubs and violent ideologies allowed it to expand beyond the U.S. borders and “bridge the gap between two nationalist scenes.”<sup>151</sup>

The U.K.’s approach to proscribing terrorist organizations appears to be more preemptive than reactive and serves to raise the costs of entry for groups wishing to perpetrate violence. Given the risk of reciprocal radicalization, this is not necessarily the wrong approach. While banning National Action was effective in helping to dismantle the organization, it also led to splintering, further complicating efforts of law enforcement and intelligence services. Moreover, the ban failed to

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<sup>147</sup> Warreth, Shahed. “Crowdfunding and Cryptocurrency Use by Far-Right and Jihadi Groups.” *Vox Pol*, November 21, 2019. <https://www.voxpol.eu/crowdfunding-and-cryptocurrency-use-by-far-right-and-jihadi-groups/>.

<sup>148</sup> Chain Analysis Team. “Alt-Right Groups and Personalities Involved In the January 2021 Capitol Riot Received Over \$500K In Bitcoin From French Donor One Month Prior.” *Chain Analysis*, January 14, 2021. <https://blog.chainalysis.com/reports/capitol-riot-bitcoin-donation-alt-right-domestic-extremism>.

<sup>149</sup> Ibsen, David et al. “Violent Right-Wing Extremism and Terrorism – Transnational Collectivity, Definitions, Incidents, Structures and Countermeasures.” Counter Extremism Project: November 2020. [https://www.counterextremism.com/sites/default/files/CEP%20Study\\_Violent%20Right-Wing%20Extremism%20and%20Terrorism\\_Nov%202020.pdf](https://www.counterextremism.com/sites/default/files/CEP%20Study_Violent%20Right-Wing%20Extremism%20and%20Terrorism_Nov%202020.pdf).

<sup>150</sup> See for example: Cynthia Miller-Idriss, *Hate in the Homeland: The New Global Far Right*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2020.

<sup>151</sup> Zidan, Karim. “Fascist fight clubs: how white nationalists use MMA as a recruiting tool.” *Guardian*, September 11, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2018/sep/11/far-right-fight-clubs-mma-white-nationalists>.

sufficiently undermine the brand appeal of NA, which continued to thrive in various forms online.<sup>152</sup> That said, the U.K. has done an admirable job in rolling up these groups and disrupting far-right extremist networks throughout the country.

Small groups can spread quickly, especially in today's operating environment, where individuals have a propensity to radicalize in expedited time frames. To date, the U.K. has proscribed five far-right organizations, including The Base, National Action (NA), Sonnenkrieg Division (SKD), Feuerkrieg Division (FKD), and Atomwaffen Division (AWD). Several other groups are designated under a synonym, an umbrella group, or by affiliation, including Scottish Dawn, National Socialist Anti-Capitalist Action (NS131), System Resistance Network (SRN), and National Socialist Order (NSO). A separate section of this paper will further detail states' responses to the threat.

One of the main takeaways of the extremism landscape in the latter half of 2021, especially as lockdowns throughout the United Kingdom lift and a return to "normal life" resumes, is to be prepared for the emergence of new or reinvigorated "groupuscules," in the parlance of Graham Macklin, which can spread quickly and with little warning. In an interview with *Tech vs. Terrorism*, researchers suggested that a key feature of the far-right in the U.K., and indeed more broadly, is the diversification of the movement and a constant effort to "increasingly rebrand themselves."<sup>153</sup> Moreover, as evidenced by Thomas Mair and Darren Osborne, lone actors influenced by the broader far-right violent extremist milieu will remain a challenge, one made infinitely more difficult by the low-cost and opportunistic nature of some attacks, including vehicle ramming.<sup>154</sup>

The future of far-right violent extremism in the United Kingdom will likely be impacted by developments in the United States. The continued rise of neo-Nazi ideology and violent white supremacy is a global phenomenon and increasing connections and linkages between far-right extremists will strengthen existing networks and likely give rise to new ones. In an interview with one of Poland's leading researchers on far-right extremism, they described the globalization of white supremacy and neo-Nazi ideology, remarking that in Europe, the movement is far more transnational than in the past, when nationalism bound individuals more closely to their countries of origin. On the contrary, today, this researcher suggested that concepts like "the Great Replacement" and "white genocide" serve as the engine of far-right extremism in Europe.<sup>155</sup> The ideas underpinning

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<sup>152</sup> Macklin, Graham. "Only Bullets will Stop Us! – The Banning of National Action in Britain." *Perspectives on Terrorism*, December 2018, 12(6), 104-122.

<sup>153</sup> Interview, *Tech vs. Terrorism*, June 2021.

<sup>154</sup> Keen, Florence and Kayla Izenman. "Fundraising for Right-Wing Extremist Movements." *The RUSI Journal*, May 30, 2019, 164(2), 10-23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2019.1621479>.

<sup>155</sup> Interview, Przemysław Witkowski, Senior Research Director, Instytut Bezpieczeństwa Społecznego, July 2021.

this rhetorical reframing are not new, even if the specific language used and phrases referenced might be. Events such as the 2018 Independence March in Poland have drawn far-right extremists from Italy, the Netherlands, Hungary, and the United Kingdom.<sup>156</sup> The Polish expert on far-right extremism noted that there are now numerous hubs throughout Europe where a variety of extremists, including but not limited to so-called “neo-pagans,” white separatists, and neo-Nazis, congregate and exchange ideas, know-how, and contacts in order to strengthen and grow transnational linkages within the movement.

Counterterrorism authorities and intelligence agencies will need to be agile in how they respond, examining how the movement has evolved and proposing novel methods of countering future growth. A central takeaway from looking at far-right extremism in the United Kingdom is the change in approach by the authorities. In an interview with a former high-ranking member of the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ), the respondent suggested that historically, the intelligence services did not take the far-right very seriously and viewed groups like Combat 18 and various skinheads as more akin to hooligans than terrorists.<sup>157</sup> But, as another former intelligence official commented, the far-right is “no longer the hapless and hopeless brigade.” Rather, he commented, what were previously “isolated individuals” are “now coming together in much more organized cellular structures with a political drive, using the internet to spread powerful messages, and are better connected and more coordinated than they were before.”<sup>158</sup>

Finally, a note on the gender dimension of the far-right threat. A detailed analysis is beyond the scope of this paper but it remains important to note that far-right extremists on both sides of the Atlantic share a focus on traditional notions of femininity and women’s roles and that women remain important actors in the movement,<sup>159</sup> even if not always visible or accounted for in official metrics.<sup>160</sup> Broadly speaking, ideal women in the movement have an unwavering belief in the importance of racial purity and the need to defend it, and their primary contribution to the movement is seen as the care of family and the production of racially pure offspring, though many

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<sup>156</sup> Hinshaw, Drew and Natalia Ojewski. “Far-Right Groups Join Massive March Against Polish Independence.” *Wall Street Journal*, November 11, 2018. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/far-right-groups-join-massive-march-marking-polish-independence-1541970371>.

<sup>157</sup> Interview, former senior intelligence official, United Kingdom, May 2021.

<sup>158</sup> Interview, Butler, May 2021.

<sup>159</sup> See for example: Miller-Idriss, *Hate in the Homeland: The New Global Far Right*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2020.; and Darby, Seyward. “The Rise of the Valkyries.” *Harper’s Magazine*, September 2017. <https://harpers.org/archive/2017/09/the-rise-of-the-valkyries/>.

<sup>160</sup> For a more detailed breakdown of the estimated numbers of women in various far-right movements in Europe and the United States, see for example: Ibsen, David et al. “Violent Right-Wing Extremism and Terrorism – Transnational Collectivity, Definitions, Incidents, Structures and Countermeasures.” Counter Extremism Project. [https://www.counterextremism.com/sites/default/files/CEP%20Study\\_Violent%20Right-Wing%20Extremism%20and%20Terrorism\\_Nov%202020.pdf](https://www.counterextremism.com/sites/default/files/CEP%20Study_Violent%20Right-Wing%20Extremism%20and%20Terrorism_Nov%202020.pdf).

also contribute the movement through important organizational roles. Seward Darby, author of *Sisters In Hate: American Women On The Front Lines Of White Nationalism*, noted that:

"Women in this movement oftentimes work behind the scenes. There was a woman in Charlottesville in 2017 who was a key organizer on digital apps, the kind of person who was connecting folks so that they got rides places, making sure that a schedule was in place, things like that, but not the kind of person who was necessarily behind the microphones at a rally. And the other reason for this is just that the movement is not interested in talking. Many, many members of the movement are not interested in talking to the mainstream media. So I think that just because you don't see women out in force doesn't mean that they're not there and doesn't mean that the work that they're doing for these movements isn't essential. It's, quite frankly, like women's labor in a lot of other, you know, facets of society. It's invisible but essential."<sup>161</sup>

Although some groups have sought to project a more inclusive image and one that acknowledges more contemporary notions of gender equality, Daniel Koehler argues that this is just a superficial veneer and that groups remain committed to a fundamentally hierarchical notion that cannot accept women as equal; ""The existing gender discourse is mostly for show; if the far right actually agreed to gender equality, it would be a first step to agreeing that biological differences don't matter. So, [in the far-right movement], women have to have a very specific role, they cannot really get over this; if there are women leaders, it's mostly for show."<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Simon, Scott. "Seward Darby Delves Into Women's Role In The Far-Right Movement." *National Public Radio*, January 9, 2021. <https://www.npr.org/2021/01/09/955191984/seward-darby-delves-into-womens-role-in-the-far-right-movement>.

<sup>162</sup> Interview, Koehler, September 2021.

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## POLICY AND PRACTICE: NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL RESPONSES

In July 2021, Director General of MI5 Ken McCallum offered an annual assessment of threats facing the United Kingdom. Highlighting the malign intentions and capabilities of state actors and the risks of cyber-attacks and espionage, he stressed the continued risks posed by terrorism. He stressed that Islamist extremist threats remained the most significant threat to the U.K. but highlighted that “extreme right-wing terrorism is here to stay.” Of the 29 late-stage terrorist attacks foiled over the past four years, 10 were extreme right wing, as are one-in-five current terrorist investigations, McCallum said.

However, the counterterrorism framework in the United Kingdom has been designed as “ideologically agnostic” and able to address multiple forms of terrorism, despite being driven largely by the attacks of September 11, 2001. As such, it offers valuable lessons learned for states grappling with similar challenges, including the United States. The U.K.’s domestic counterterrorism strategy, CONTEST, was developed in 2002 with the threat of transnational Salafi-jihadist groups like al-Qaeda in mind. However, CONTEST, made up of four pillars focused on prevention, interdiction, protection, and emergency and crisis preparation—PREVENT, PURSUE, PROTECT and PREPARE, respectively—remains the applicable framework for all terrorist threats and risks.<sup>163</sup> Significantly, while the U.K. increased attention to violent right-wing extremism in the wake of the Breivik attacks, it was largely in response to the English Defense League that the 2011 version for the first time included “all forms of extremism” with an emphasis on right wing extremism.<sup>164</sup> Several European countries have also mirrored this format in their own counterterrorism strategies. Consequently, counterterrorism practitioners have been able to adapt relatively quickly to address the threat as it evolves. Already in November 2020, well before the Capitol insurrection, there was an increase in violent far-right extremist referrals to the Channel programs, the component of PREVENT which provides early interventions and support to radicalized or vulnerable individuals.<sup>165</sup> Of cases referred to the

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<sup>163</sup> Terrorism related to Northern Ireland is, however, handled through a separate framework in the United Kingdom.

<sup>164</sup> McCann, Craig J.J. *The Prevent Strategy and Right-wing Extremism: A Case Study of the English Defence League*. Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2019.

<sup>165</sup> Grierson, Jamie and Dan Sabbagh. “Largest Number of Prevent Referrals Related to Far-Right Extremism.” *Guardian*, November 26, 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/nov/26/just-one-in-10-prevent-referrals-found-at-risk-of-radicalisation>.

program, 43% were for extreme right-wing radicalization, while 30% were for Islamist radicalization; this may however be an indication of greater attention to the threat and understanding of the risks by communities and the government as opposed to a proportional representation of existing threat levels by ideology.

The assessment that the primary threat to the United Kingdom remains from transnational Islamist groups like al-Qaeda, ISIS, and their supporters was also reaffirmed in the U.K.'s 2021 Integrated Review of security, defense, development and foreign policy. However, the review also notes that "far-right, far-left, anarchist and single-issue terrorism" are sources of threats in the U.K. Additionally, it notes, "in Northern Ireland, there remains a risk that some groups could seek to encourage and exploit political instability."<sup>166</sup> The Review also highlights the increased resources allocated for Counter-Terrorism Policing and the establishment of a Counter-Terrorism Operations Center, investments in counterterrorism capacities that can respond to a wide range of threats without requiring any significant overhaul. Moreover, U.K. counterterrorism practitioners and experts have highlighted the fact that historically, the country has confronted a range of threats and ideologically driven groups, leaving both the public and professionals more responsive to contexts, deploying police-led counterterrorism in some cases, and militarily driven operations in others. Nonetheless, threats posed by violent far-right groups have often been dismissed as "football hooliganism" or "homophobia" or "violent anti-immigrant sentiment" because they were not perceived as being part of an organized movement, or as having transnational connections, which would inform the nature of the response required.

The establishment of a program like PREVENT in the United Kingdom has allowed the government to leverage local government and services, community-oriented and civil society organizations, and regional or international partnerships to develop individualized interventions for those referred for radicalization risks. Individuals may be supported by educational or medical institutions, local employment and social services, and faith-based or other NGOs, where a law enforcement response is deemed unnecessary. The program has undergone heavy criticism from community activists who have argued it stigmatizes beneficiaries, securitizes all community or local problems and, through its statutory duty, pressures teachers, healthcare workers, and families to report on suspicious activity and overreport threats.<sup>167</sup> However, unlike many other countries, the U.K. has established a transparent process of regular reviews, through the roles of the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism

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<sup>166</sup> "Global Britain in a Competitive Age." HM Government, March 2021, 32. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/975077/Global\\_Britain\\_in\\_a\\_Competitive\\_Age-\\_the\\_Integrated\\_Review\\_of\\_Security\\_\\_Defence\\_\\_Development\\_and\\_Foreign\\_Policy.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/975077/Global_Britain_in_a_Competitive_Age-_the_Integrated_Review_of_Security__Defence__Development_and_Foreign_Policy.pdf).

<sup>167</sup> Warrell, Helen. "Inside Prevent, the UK's Controversial Anti-Terrorism Programme." *Financial Times*, January 24, 2019. <https://www.ft.com/content/a82e18b4-1ea3-11e9-b126-46fc3ad87c65>.

Legislation (IRTL) and the Independent Review of Prevent, and has updated the program in response to lessons learned and challenges identified. The increased partnership between government and local communities plays an important role in reducing the emphasis on a law enforcement response. Many criticisms have focused on reports of resultant stigmatization of the Muslim community; responses to PREVENT engagement on extreme right-wing cases have been less pronounced, and it remains to be seen whether beneficiary communities share similar concerns.

The division in the United States between “domestic” and “international” terrorism has created two very divergent approaches and toolkits to address evolving terrorist threats. In the absence of a national program akin to PREVENT, efforts to prevent violent extremism in the domestic context have focused more on local partnerships and programs, emphasizing the role of municipalities, cities, and civil society, such as those implemented by the Department of Homeland Security’s Center for Partnerships and Prevention.<sup>168</sup> Much of the U.S. counterterrorism machinery has been directed at international terrorist groups, emphasizing kinetic, legal, and policy approaches designed to impede attacks and threats against the U.S. homeland. Although U.S. government officials had voiced increased concern about “racially and ethnically motivated violent extremism” (RMVE) prior to the events of January 6, the attack by a violent mob of insurrectionists, comprised of violent far-right groups, conspiracy theorists, anti-government and militia violent extremists, and their supporters prompted a swift response from the government. On the law enforcement side, the U.S. Department of Justice has opened over 600 investigations into those who were present in Washington D.C. on and participated in the January 6 attacks.

Soon after, in June, 2021, the White House released the first ever National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism.<sup>169</sup> A welcome change from the approach adopted by the previous administration under Donald Trump, the Strategy affirmed that, “Domestic terrorism poses a serious and evolving threat,” and that “one key aspect of today’s domestic terrorism threat emerges from racially or ethnically motivated violent extremists and networks whose racial, ethnic, or religious hatred leads them toward violence, as well as those whom they encourage to take violent action.”

The Strategy outlined four pillars of action:

- Understand and share domestic terrorism-related information
- Prevent domestic terrorism recruitment and mobilization to violence
- Disrupt and Deter Domestic Terrorism Activity
- Confront Long-Term Contributors to Domestic Terrorism

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<sup>168</sup> “Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships.” United States Department of Homeland Security. <https://www.dhs.gov/CP3>.

<sup>169</sup> “National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism.” National Security Council, June 2021. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/National-Strategy-for-Countering-Domestic-Terrorism.pdf>.

Each pillar contains several strategic goals intended to inform and shape government actions and approaches to the domestic extremist threat, emphasizing the importance of implementation with respect to the protections offered by the U.S. Constitution. Reflecting the commitments made by President Joe Biden in his inauguration speech, the new National Strategy creates an important framework for federal agencies and partners and reflects a positive shift in government attitudes to the threat. However, as security experts Colin Clarke and Mollie Saltskog have noted, there are also a number of weaknesses, including a lack of a “definitive policy recommendation” and little clarity on how to deal with “violent self-proclaimed militias,” including groups like the Oath Keepers and Three Percenters.<sup>170</sup>

A recent study visit between practitioners from Europe and the United States, organized by the Radicalization Awareness Network and in which The Soufan Center participated, highlighted the recent elevation of the violent right-wing extremist threat in the United States, the importance of learning from previous experiences, and lessons learned in countries coping with similar challenges, past and present. Practitioners concluded that:

“Violent Right-Wing Extremism is recently identified as the greatest threat to domestic security in the US and it poses a growing risk in Europe. The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified this trend with the increase of anti-Semitic and anti-governmental narratives, and with a rise in the activity of VRWE groups.”

Moreover, practitioners noted, “In the past decade violent right-wing extremist (VRWE) movements have become increasingly connected internationally both online and offline. VRWE-affiliated groups and individuals travel to inspire and mimic one another across borders. VRWE hubs cooperate internationally to organize marches, paramilitary trainings, and access ammunition. The size and the professionalism of these groups are also remarkably greater.”<sup>171</sup> Following an extensive dialogue on past and current experiences and lessons learned on both sides of the Atlantic, including a focus on the EXIT programs established in Europe and recently adapted in the U.S., as well as the emphasis on strengthening local partnerships in communities and cities in the United States, key recommendations stressed the importance of a solid evidence base; strengthening multi-stakeholder partnerships; exploring the strategic use of legal and administrative approaches to disrupt VRWE operations; public-private partnerships with technology firms; and working with

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<sup>170</sup> Clarke, Colin P. and Mollie Saltskog. “Assessing the National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism.” *War on the Rocks*, June 22, 2021. <https://warontherocks.com/2021/06/assessing-the-national-strategy-for-countering-domestic-terrorism/>.

<sup>171</sup> Radicalization Awareness Network, Conclusions from Digital Study Visit, EU-USA, March 2021.

specialized civil society actors on education, awareness raising, and counter-radicalization and mobilization campaigns.<sup>172</sup>

Beyond domestic measures and military responses to terrorist threats in conflict zones, such as the Global Coalition Against Daesh, and bilateral counterterrorism operations, both the United States and the United Kingdom have developed and joined multilateral counterterrorism platforms. Through the United Nations, the U.S. and U.K. have worked with partners to implement a sanctions regime that imposes an asset freeze and travel ban on individuals or groups designated by members of the UN Security Council, under the regime first established by Security Council Resolution 1267 (the “1267” sanctions). Shortly after the attacks of September 11, 2001, and under the leadership of the United States, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1373, with a host of binding obligations on all states to take measures to disrupt terrorist financing, secure borders to prevent terrorist travel, and adopt legislation criminalizing terrorist acts. The resolution contains no sunset clause, is not limited in application to any country or region, and is not circumscribed in application to any specific terrorist group, unlike the “1267” sanctions.

Criticized as a draconian and unprecedented intrusion into sovereign states’ domestic legal and policy prerogatives, Resolution 1373 has become the “keystone” in a complex framework of multilateral instruments to foster international legal cooperation, capacity-building and political partnerships against the background of vast differences among states.<sup>173</sup> In 2006, the General Assembly followed suit in adopting the UN Global Counterterrorism Strategy (GCTS), heralded as a breakthrough at the time for representing a consensus among all states on the need for an approach that included prevention, law enforcement and legal tools, and a foundation in human rights. Echoing CONTEST, the four pillars of the GCTS provided not only a normative framework, but also guidance and direction for over 40 UN funds, agencies, and programs, as well as field offices, in shaping their work relating to counterterrorism and preventing violent extremism.<sup>174</sup>

While the instruments and programs developed by the UN largely respond to the threat posed by al-Qaeda and ISIS, there are a number of tools that can be applied to addressing violent far-right groups. The work done pursuant to Resolution 1373 and the GCTS, for example, need not be limited

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Rosand, Eric. “The Security Council as ‘Global Legislator’: Ultra Vires or Ultra Innovative?” *Fordham International Law Journal*, 2004, 20(542). <https://ir.lawnet.fordham.edu/ilj/vol28/iss3/2/>; for more on the Security Council’s legislative framework, see also: McKeever, David. “Revisiting Security Council Action on Terrorism: New Threats; (a Lot of) New Law; Same Old Problems?” *Leiden Journal of International Law*, 2021, 34(2), 441–70. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0922156521000066>.

<sup>174</sup> “Members of the Global Compact.” United Nations, Office of Counterterrorism. <https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/global-ct-compact/entities>.

in scope to Islamist extremist groups, but terrorism “in all its forms and manifestations,” as is highlighted in many UN documents. In his January 2021 report on the implementation of the GCTS, the UN Secretary General called on states to acknowledge the threat of violent far-right groups, and while there has been much wrangling between states regarding the terminology, there is consensus on the emerging threats posed by such groups.<sup>175</sup> However, even without new resolutions or mandates, the expert bodies and agencies of the UN, such as the Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate, the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism, and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) can also support country risk and capacity assessments and activities to address a wide range of terrorist threats, depending on the context.<sup>176</sup> UN measures to counter terrorist narratives, inform, and shape strategic communications to counter terrorist propaganda and recruitment efforts need not be limited in focus to Islamist extremism;<sup>177</sup> efforts to counter terrorist financing, prevent the abuse of the non-profit sector by terrorist groups, and to track new and emerging terrorist financing risks and threats similarly can be developed, or strengthened, to address designated terrorist groups irrespective of ideology.<sup>178</sup>

In addition to the United Nations, both the U.S. and U.K. have played strong roles in the establishment of the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum, an informal intergovernmental group of twenty-nine countries and the European Union.<sup>179</sup> The GCTF has focused on the development of Memoranda of Good Practices to provide informal collections of guidance and good practices on counterterrorism and countering violent extremism. Its three “inspired” institutions—the International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law (IIJ), Hedayah, and the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund—have also provided capacity-building support to a range of countries, addressing multiple risks of violent extremism. For example, the IIJ recently published a criminal justice practitioners guide, supported by the governments of the United States and United

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<sup>175</sup> “IntelBrief: United to Fight Terrorism? Reviewing the UN’s Global Counterterrorism Strategy.” The Soufan Center, May 6, 2021. <https://thesoufancenter.org/intelbrief-2021-may-6/>.

<sup>176</sup> Blazakis, Jason and Naureen Chowdhury-Fink. “The International Far-Right Terrorist Threat Requires a Multilateral Response.” *Lawfare*, April 4, 2021. <https://www.lawfareblog.com/international-far-right-terrorist-threat-requires-multilateral-response>.

<sup>177</sup> “Countering Terrorist Narratives & Strategic Communications: Lessons Learned for Tackling Far-Right Terrorism.” *The Soufan Center*, June 2021. [https://thesoufancenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/TSC-Issue-Brief\\_June-2021\\_COUNTERING-TERRORIST-NARRATIVES.pdf](https://thesoufancenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/TSC-Issue-Brief_June-2021_COUNTERING-TERRORIST-NARRATIVES.pdf).

<sup>178</sup> “Countering Terrorist Financing: Lessons Learned for Tackling Far-Right Terrorism.” *The Soufan Center*, June 17, 2021. <https://thesoufancenter.org/research/countering-terrorist-financing-lessons-learned-for-tackling-far-right-terrorism/>.

<sup>179</sup> “About the GCTF.” *Global Counterterrorism Forum*. <https://www.thegctf.org>.

Kingdom, to address racially and ethnically motivated terrorism, which supports governments in developing responses to REMVE through the criminal justice systems.<sup>180</sup>

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## CASE STUDY | Radicalization and Disengagement in the U.K.: Leaving the Violent Far-Right Movement

*In response to the rising concerns about violent far-right extremism in the United Kingdom, non-profit organizations like Exit U.K. are offering mentorship and support to individuals and families seeking help in leaving the violent far-right movement. Nigel Bromage founded the organization in 2015 after spending almost 20 years as a member of groups within the far-right movement. He described a rapid and worrying acceleration of the threat in the U.K., and a shift toward a more no-holds-barred approach, remarking, “There are no rules anymore.” Where he felt groups had once largely—though not uniformly—shied away from targeting women and children, he described active efforts to recruit even younger supporters online, especially through video games. Describing the increased caseload, he noted a year-on-year increase of 300% in Exit U.K.’s caseload from April 2020 to April 2021. Whereas in 2019 they worked with eleven people, they are now working with over 300.*

*Within the United Kingdom, far-right groups have capitalized on a sense of disillusionment with the government and the democratic political process, as well as the massive socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19. They have called for the establishment of white ethno-nationalist communities of “indigenous British” communities in places like Dorset and Scotland and framed their narrative as religious and cultural in nature, centered around Norse mythology and Odinism as well as “white civilization.”<sup>181</sup> In his time within the movement, as Nigel described, there was a deliberate effort to “muddy the waters” and appear “uneducated and stupid” by intentionally misspelling words in graffiti and messing up symbols, all intended to downplay the capacity of the group in the face of law enforcement efforts.*

*However, much like in the United States, there is now an effort to reach out to well-educated, middle-class communities and normalize far-right narratives and action. “The very extreme right in the U.K. have always looked to the United States; the USA was seen as better organized and better*

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<sup>180</sup> “IJJ Criminal Justice Practitioner’s Guide: Addressing Racially or Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremism (REMVE).” The International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law. July 13, 2021. [https://theijj.org/wp-content/uploads/J10434-IJJ-REMVE-Practitioners-Guide\\_ENG-WEB-v03.pdf](https://theijj.org/wp-content/uploads/J10434-IJJ-REMVE-Practitioners-Guide_ENG-WEB-v03.pdf).

<sup>181</sup> Briefing on far-right propaganda in the United Kingdom provided by Exit U.K. to authors.

*at small-scale, leaderless resistance,” he explained. As such, the insurrection at the Capitol on January 6 gave confidence to far-right extremists in the U.K. “The Americans are seen as ‘doers’ – even if they failed, they were [seen as] drawing a line in the sand, taking a stand.” Moreover, it was seen as a “reinforcement of the idea that elections don’t work,” Nigel concluded.*

*The internet has proved decisive in shaping the speed and reach of recruitment efforts, and far-right violent extremists have learned a lot from the materials put out by Islamist groups, particularly on tactics and operational details. Using video games and sophisticated and tailored grooming methods, far-right groups are reaching increasingly young and diverse audiences. One case involved a nine-year-old being indoctrinated to “do his duty and carry on the movement” in the event his older brother was arrested. Another individual declared himself an avowed neo-Nazi after watching a single 6.5-hour movie. Others couched their support for fascism as the “new rebellion” against their parents’ generation. “They say, we embrace fascism so that we don’t have to deal with the question of the six million,” Nigel recalled, highlighting the deliberate and nuanced approach being taken by groups now and their increasingly transnational scope. “The fight is now global, extremists know that, whether it’s the far-right or the Islamists. A lot of things may be country specific, but it’s all about best practice, and they go looking for that.”*

*The increase in caseloads seen by Exit U.K. echoes the broader trend with referrals to the PREVENT program reaching nearly 43% in Fall 2020.<sup>182</sup> However, while the threat continues to grow and evolve, the urgency created by the impacts of COVID-19 mean that funding for programs like Exit U.K. remain scarce and continue to dry up. Moreover, with programs such as Exit U.K. relying on building trust and long-term partnerships with individuals, families, and communities, it is important that projects are developed more in the 3–5-year time frame, not just 12 months. Many mentors are volunteers with other full-time jobs, contributing their time for the common goal of reducing violence and intolerance, but what’s needed is full-time staff to provide support 24/7 when people need support, late at night when they are looking for answers, otherwise they may find a far-right site instead. Indeed, government actions like proscribing groups can have two kinds of effects: On the one hand, they can make it more difficult for small NGOs to work with hardcore neo-Nazis and those on the extreme edges and make fundraising and administration more difficult; On the other hand, Nigel says “it’s important they draw a line in the sand. To say that this kind of behavior and ideas are unacceptable.”*

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<sup>182</sup> Grierson, Jamie and Dan Sabbagh. “Largest number of Prevent referrals related to far-right extremism.” *The Guardian*, November 26, 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/nov/26/just-one-in-10-prevent-referrals-found-at-risk-of-radicalisation>.

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## THE WAY FORWARD: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY & PRACTICE

The combination of domestic measures, bilateral partnerships, and multilateral cooperation provides a strong foundation to respond to both domestic and international iterations of violent far-right groups. Below is a set of recommendations for governments, international organizations, and civil society actors:

1. Governments and international organizations need to invest in deepening understanding of the violent far-right extremist threat and invest in research and analysis that identifies linkages and connections, with a view to develop concrete, evidence-informed policy responses and include a nuanced understanding of the gendered nature of the threat and responses needed, to ensure that appropriately tailored and effective initiatives take account of the specifics of various contexts and stakeholders.
2. Governments looking to develop approaches to addressing increased threats from violent far-right groups can build on existing good practices and tools; networks focused on practice and learning, such as the EU's Radicalization Awareness Network, the Strong Cities Network, and the Nordic Safe Cities Network offer some models that can foster dialogue on practical experiences and lessons learned.
3. Strengthen international partnerships and learning from states that are—or have—confronted this threat. Many states, such as Germany, Norway, and Finland, for example, have experience countering violent far-right groups. The extensive efforts in Germany to root out violent extremism from the military and law enforcement entities; the investigation, national commission, and police reforms in Norway, and the establishment of a dedicated center on right wing extremism following the terrorist attacks of July 22, 2011; and the establishment of the Christchurch Call following the attacks in New Zealand in 2019, all provide important learning and collaboration opportunities.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> "A Perfect Storm: White Supremacists, Conspiracy Theories, and Violent Extremism." *The Soufan Center*, June 30, 2021. <https://thesoufancenter.org/the-soufan-center-webinar-a-perfect-storm-white-supremacists-conspiracy-theories-and-violent-extremism/>.

4. Policymakers in the United States should consider developing a national framework for prevention in the U.S., drawing lessons from the PREVENT program and countries like Germany, which have had to manage localization and coordination challenges in different locales. Part of a national framework should include a requirement for periodic transparent bipartisan reviews (such as the U.K.'s Independent Review of PREVENT, or the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, for example).
5. Although the U.S. does not at this time designate domestic terrorists, policymakers should consider designating international chapters of U.S.-based groups, where relevant, as Foreign Terrorist Organizations, to address potential financial and operational linkages.
6. In the U.K., policymakers should develop an assessment of the impact of proscriptions to identify the most effective approaches and consider harmonizing domestic proscriptions with international designations where there may be international chapters of U.K.-based groups.
7. Governments should invest in disengagement and rehabilitation programs, such as Exit U.K. and others like it, and ensure that they have access to predictable and sustainable funding to ensure staff retention, access and expertise, and to develop long-term monitoring and evaluation capacities.
8. Governments and civil society groups must take proactive measures, through educational institutions, strategic communications, and support for civil society to tackle the underlying grievances and narratives that fuel the far-right movement, such as racism and inequality. Strong public and government communications, such as those around the virulent attacks on the England football players this summer, provide good illustrative examples.
9. International bodies such as the United Nations, the Global Counterterrorism Forum, and the Financial Action Task Force should work with civil society groups and the private sector to identify linkages in international financing and material support avenues, building on the recent report on ethnically or racially motivated terrorism funding,<sup>184</sup> and consider the development of a FATF Special Recommendation to address violent far-right groups.
10. States and the United Nations should actively consider what existing legal and policy tools can be applied to address transnational dimensions of violent far-right groups. Security Council Resolution 1373 for example, includes several measures to counter the financing of

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<sup>184</sup> "Ethnically or Racially Motivated Terrorism Financing." The Financial Action Task Force (FATF). June 2021. <https://www.fatf-gafi.org/publications/methodsandtrends/documents/ethnically-racially-motivated-terrorism-financing.html>.

terrorism which can be applied to a range of groups, as do resolutions 2462 and 2468, with important updates to the regime reflecting new technologies and financing methods. Implementation measures, supported by international entities like the GCTF, UN Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate, UN Office of Counter-Terrorism, as well as the FATF, can be designed to address violent far-right groups as well as the threat posed by al-Qaeda and ISIS.

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## ABOUT THE SOUFAN CENTER

The Soufan Center (TSC) is an independent non-profit center offering research, analysis, and strategic dialogue on global security challenges and foreign policy issues, with a particular focus on counterterrorism, violent extremism, armed conflict, and the rule of law. Our work is underpinned by a recognition that human rights and human security perspectives are critical to developing credible, effective, and sustainable solutions. TSC fills a niche role by producing objective and innovative reports and analyses, and fostering dynamic dialogue and exchanges, to effectively equip governments, international organizations, the private sector, and civil society with key resources to inform policies and practice.

