Foreword from the Executive Director

This Issue Brief is part of a project undertaken by The Soufan Center, with the support of the Airey Neave Trust in London, United Kingdom, to deepen understanding about the impact of sanctions and proscriptions on terrorist groups, with a focus on violent far-right actors. Through research, interviews, and consultations with key stakeholders, TSC considered whether the measures taken by several states – in particular, the U.K., Canada, and other “Five Eyes” members – have had the desired impacts, whether on a legal, political, or operational level. Throughout the process, the team has had the opportunity to speak with government officials representing several countries, both “Five Eyes” states and others, who have grappled with the challenge of far-right terrorism, as well as UN officials, experts, and practitioners. To facilitate some discussions, TSC organized two roundtables, one in Washington D.C. and one engaging participants from the United Kingdom, and benefitted greatly from the insights shared. We are grateful to all these interlocutors for their time and feedback.

The Issue Briefs developed for this project each consider different aspects of the challenge – lessons learned from the sanctions measures developed to address Al-Qaeda and ISIS; how the violent far-right movement has evolved and what, if any elements may be amendable to sanctions; and lessons learned from proscriptions and designations taken to date in several states to designate violent far-right extremist groups as terrorists. Each contributes to informing a wider question on whether sanctions are an appropriate tool for the transnational dimensions of far-right terrorist groups, and whether there is a role for international actors like the U.N. in responding to these developments. We hope that the findings and policy recommendations will provide a useful basis for policymakers and practitioners as they consider how to address an increasingly diverse and complex terrorist threat.

Naureen Chowdhury Fink
• The contemporary violent far-right movement features, to a large extent, the following key trends: a diffuse and non-formalized network with dense online connections; a limited reliance on traveling and in-person organization; and a prevalence of low-complexity, low-tech, and copy-paste attacks.

• Sanctions, listings, and proscriptions of violent far-right extremist groups and individuals could counter some of these identified trends—primarily financial and operational aspects, but also some ideological aspects, if to a lesser degree.

• Sanctions and proscriptions can also enable different tools, such as intelligence gathering and analysis, which further enhance a state’s understanding of how some of the identified trends facilitate acts of violence within the movement. For example, this could include how cryptocurrency is traded within the movement and to what degree cryptocurrency is used in planning and carrying out an act of terrorism.

• It is, however, important to recognize the limitations of sanctions as a tool, especially when considering the nature of the violent far-right threat and the key trends highlighted in this brief. The fluidity, leaderlessness, and lack of clear command and control structures of the movement complicate the ability of governments to apply sanctions and designate/list/proscribe groups under current legal frameworks.

• **Recommendations** include: consider designating foreign violent far-right groups and individuals under either U.S. foreign terrorist organizations (FTOs) or Executive Order (E.O.) 13224 designation authorities; innovate to develop additional forms of regulations to counter the violent far-right movement, beyond sanctions; focus on strengthening international and multilateral cooperation among Five Eyes (FVEY) countries in countering the threat from the far-right terrorism, and build on that with relevant partners; and strengthen international cooperation to counter the narratives of the violent far-right movement.
INTRODUCTION

This Issue Brief will examine four key trends in the violent far-right landscape with a focus on how these facilitate ideological, financial, and/or operational aspects of the movement, and whether/how sanctions prove a useful tool in countering or constraining these trends within the movement. This brief is based on a combination of desk research, interviews with experts, practitioners, and government officials, as well as insights shared during two roundtable discussions hosted by The Soufan Center (TSC).

This brief identifies four key trends associated with the violent far-right movement, with a view to considering the applicability and effectiveness of sanctions in this context. The first trend is the role of advanced technologies in violent far-right groups; specifically: social media, cryptocurrency, end-to-end encryption, and 3D-printing of firearms. The second trend is the recruitment of children and youth. The third trend is the trans-nationalization of the movement. The fourth trend is the phenomenon of ideological convergence of violent ideologies making up the contemporary violent far-right movement. Not all of these trends are either exhaustive of or exclusive to the violent far-right movement but can also be found in terrorist movements motivated by other ideologies. Where the violent far-right movement appears more adept at utilizing or benefitting from a specific trend, as compared to other terrorist movements, this is noted in the text.

The research and interviews conducted for this paper indicate that these trends frequently overlap and are, on occasion, mutually reinforcing. It is important to acknowledge the existence of organizations and groups—which sport clear command-and-control structures and formalized memberships—within the broader violent far-right ecosystem. The trends examined in this Issue Brief have, however, aided in defining the contemporary violent far-right movement as a diffuse and non-formalized, yet transnational, network supported by online connections. Within this network, facilitated by advanced technologies, a plethora of violent ideologies remain accessible from which to pick and choose to justify violence, coupled with tactics to mobilize toward an act of violence with a global audience—contributing to the prevalence of low-complexity, low-tech, and copy-paste attacks.

TREND #1: HARNESING THE ADVANCEMENT OF TECHNOLOGY

It is important to note that while this Issue Brief focuses specifically on how far-right extremist groups and individuals utilize these emerging technologies, violent extremists and terrorists espousing other ideologies also make use of the same to further their own goals. For example, there are key similarities between how the Salafi-jihadist movement

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1 One, held in Washington D.C. in May 2022, brought together U.S. government officials, diplomats representing states affected by the threat, as well as experts, and civil society organizations. A second virtual roundtable convened U.K. government officials, members of the Airey Neave Trust Board in London, U.N. officials and experts with a focus on the United Kingdom. For brief summaries and further information about the project visit: https://thesoufancenter.org/projects/deterrence-and-denial-the-impact-of-sanctions-and-designations-on-violent-far-right-groups/.
and the violent far-right movement have utilized the internet to facilitate radicalization, recruitment, and mobilization to violence. Indeed, just as technological advances impact our everyday life, it also impacts most aspects of how terrorist and violent extremist actors further their hateful creed and goals of violence. In 2019, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) noted, “Technological advances influence how people radicalize to violent extremism and mobilize to violence; empower violent extremists to portray attackers as role models; provide attackers with new tactical avenues and means of destruction; and create vulnerabilities to information operations, including by foreign states, that are designed to enhance the attractiveness of violent extremist causes.”

**Social Media**

The growing violent far-right threat in the United States, the United Kingdom, and across western countries has been catalyzed by online radicalization and mobilization to violence as exemplified by some of the deadliest attacks. On May 14, 2022, a gunman motivated by white supremacy extremism and “the great replacement” theory killed 10 people—the majority of whom were African-American—in a supermarket in Buffalo, NY. His 180-page manifesto, filled with racism and hate, detailed how he was almost exclusively radicalized and mobilized to violence online through social media platforms within two years. The 2017 Finsbury Park mosque attacker in the United Kingdom, who drove a van through a crowd of worshippers, killing

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one, also radicalized within a month both through consuming mainstream content, as well as white supremacy and Islamophobic conspiracy theories on social media.\(^5\)

Social media has allowed violent far-right individuals and organizations to disseminate extremist content and facilitate the creation of a diffuse yet vast network of extremists within and across state borders to an unprecedented level. Far-right extremist organizations and individuals have utilized emerging communications technology, especially social media, for a range of activities—including networking, radicalizing, recruiting, financing, and planning attacks and other violent activities.\(^6\) Violent far-right individuals have been inspired and influenced by others that have committed acts of terrorism, posting manifestos and live-streaming attacks online. Indeed, for far-right terrorists, the culture of manifestos and live-streams has become a unique facet of how violence is celebrated and furthered, and social media is the vehicle by which these are disseminated.\(^7\) Social media thus allows for individuals who are not affiliated with a formal organization or group to feel affinity with the broader violent far-right movement and build a community, gaining access to a global network of likeminded individuals.

At the same time, social media platforms have struggled to curb the proliferation of violent far-right content online to the point where experts are warning of the “mainstreaming” of far-right extremist conspiracy theories and ideologies online.\(^8\) This is a concerning trend, because while liberal democracies must ensure the protection of free speech, mainstreaming complicates the efforts of regulators and enforcers to identify what should be defined as “extremist content.”\(^9\)

Where traditional platforms have sometimes managed to expel violence-promoting individuals and groups—for example, when technology firms deplatform individuals or organizations on terrorist lists—extremists have often sought refuge on less regulated platforms and niche forums such as Telegram, Gab, and 4Chan.

**Cryptocurrencies**

Evidence suggests that violent far-right individuals and groups have been early adopters of cryptocurrency to finance and fundraise. A 2021 investigation by Southern Poverty Law Center found that over 600

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\(^7\) Graham Macklin, “The Christchurch ASacks: Livestream Terror in the Viral Video Age,” *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point* 12, no. 16 (July 18, 2019), https://ctc.westpoint.edu/christchurch-attacks-livestream-terror-viral-video-age/.


\(^9\) Roundtable Discussion, hosted by The Soufan Center, Virtual, June 29, 2022.
crypto addresses were associated with known far-right extremist individuals or groups, including white supremacist ideologue Greg Johnson and neo-Nazi group the Goyim Defense League.\textsuperscript{10} The Nordic white supremacy and neo-Nazi organization the Nordic Resistance Movement also uses bitcoin to finance their activities and encourage supporters to donate using cryptocurrencies, as the organization has been prevented from having a bank account.\textsuperscript{11} Indeed, fundraising activities utilizing cryptocurrencies could prove a potential threat, primarily because crypto markets are less regulated than, for example, the formal banking system. Criminal groups and organizations are also taking advantage of this gap, which could create a further terrorism-crime nexus in which cryptocurrency proves to be the primary financial tool. In 2021, criminals laundered \$8.6 billion of cryptocurrency—a year-on-year increase of 30 percent.\textsuperscript{12}

It is, however, important to note that the current applicability of cryptocurrencies to finance violent activities and organization within the violent far-right milieu, and other violence-promoting ideologies for that matter, is a complex issue. First, crypto currencies are increasingly becoming regulated, allowing for traditional anti-money laundering tools to aid in countering the financing of terrorism. Second, individuals within the violent far-right movement still appear to differ in their beliefs on the efficacy of crypto currencies for financing purposes. For example, the Buffalo shooter mentioned that crypto was “worthless” for his violent operational plans.\textsuperscript{13} Meanwhile, other violent far-right ideologues and known propagandists promote crypto currencies, like bitcoin, to their followers for their own financial profit.\textsuperscript{14} Nevertheless, there are instances within the violent far-right movement in which crypto currencies serve as an ideological incentive, because it adopts a non-state based form of financing. Organizations like The Base and others that adhere to accelerationist ideology encourage members and followers to adopt pattern-of-life activities that are primarily “off-the-grid” to minimize government oversight, dependence, and surveillance.\textsuperscript{15}

Still, little evidence exists that points to what exactly cryptocurrency is used for within the violent far-right movement. Specifically, whether cryptocurrencies are used for the creation of propaganda and other organizational activities, or if it is actually used to support and or commission of acts of terrorism. For example, January 6 organizer Nick Fuentes


\textsuperscript{13} Payton Gendron, Personal Manifesto.


received the bulk of a December 28, 2020, Bitcoin transaction—worth about $250,000—
which could have aided him organizationally leading up to and during the attack on the U.S. Capitol. However, he has maintained that he did not incite the violence nor enter the Capitol that day. In addition, a 2019 report by RAND noted that the lack of widespread adaptation is likely a prohibiting factor for terrorist groups or extremist individuals, because “cryptocurrencies are not well matched with the totality of features that would be needed and desirable to terrorist groups.” Indeed, research suggest that, among violent extremist organizations and individuals, crypto is used in less than five percent of organizational and operational financing, suggesting that the applicability is still minimal.

3D Printing of Firearms

The 3D printing of weapons, especially firearms, can aid an extremist group or organization in acquiring more lethal weapons for an attack. This evolution comes at a time when more violent far-right groups and supporters appear to accept the notion of the use violence as a means of achieving political change.

Using 3D printed firearms can be an attractive tactic to members of the far-right extremist movement intent on committing acts of violence as it offers two primary

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benefits. First, for individuals in countries where access to firearms is strictly regulated, it provides an avenue to more easily acquire lethal weapons. The 2021 arrest of a far-right extremist in Sweden highlights this; Swedish police records indicate that the man was likely planning a mass-casualty attack, and they found a half-written manifesto in his home alongside 3D printed-firearms and bomb-making material.\(^{23}\) According to the Nordic Resistance Movement, the man had reportedly been denied a weapons license in Sweden because of his affiliation with the group, which could be one of the reasons why he sought instructions online on how to 3D print semi-automatic weapons.\(^{24}\)

Second, even where access to firearms is not strictly regulated, such as in the United States, 3D printing of parts or the whole weapon makes it more difficult for law enforcement to trace before or in the aftermath of an attack. U.S. neo-Nazi groups, The Base (designated as a terrorist entity in New Zealand and Canada) and the Atomwaffen Division (AWD) (proscribed in the United Kingdom and Canada), have highlighted this particular benefit.\(^{25}\)

While there are no examples to date of successful far-right attacks utilizing 3D-printed firearms, experts warn that each attack in which a 3D-printed weapon is used serves as inspiration.\(^{26}\) A prominent example is that of 27-year-old Stephan Balliet, who in 2019 attempted to attack a synagogue in Halle, Germany, during the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur, and was the first known violent far-right attacker to use a 3D-printed firearm. However, the weapon frequently jammed or misfired during the attack, illustrating the difficulty of printing a fully-functioning, and reliable weapon. Still, it could be an inspiration for future attackers. Terrorism experts Bruce Hoffman and Jacob Ware warned that “the shooter sought to demonstrate the possibility of making simple, lethal, hard-to-trace, homemade guns... More such attempts will likely follow, each building on the other to become increasingly deadly.”\(^{27}\) It appears that the man arrested in Sweden in 2021 with not yet completed 3D-printed weapons had drawn inspiration and learned from the Halle shooter; police found videos of the man test-firing a completed 3D-printed firearm, likely an attempt to identify and correct potential malfunctions prior to the attack itself.\(^{28}\)

The Use of Sanctions, Listings, and Proscriptions

Sanctions, listings, and proscriptions of violent far-right groups and individuals could be useful in limiting or countering the utilization of emerging technology within the

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\(^{24}\) Radio Nordfront Broadcast, Nordic Resistance Movement.


\(^{27}\) Ibid.

violent far-right movement. For example, it appears that governments are capable of dismantling and seizing the assets of crypto-wallets. In 2020, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) announced “the government’s largest-ever seizure of cryptocurrency in the terrorism context,” which involved the dismantling of crypto-assets of designated FTOs: the al-Qassam Brigades, Hamas’s military wing, al-Qaeda, and Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS). Likewise, following the protests by truckers in Canada, the Canadian government, in addition to freezing bank accounts, also froze a crypto fundraising platform. While neither of the aforementioned examples are of sanctioned or proscribed violent far-right groups, it illustrates that the capability exists for governments to disrupt cryptocurrency financing within the movement.

In addition, sanctions and proscriptions can also provide governments, law enforcement, and the intelligence community with tools to enhance their understanding of how cryptocurrency is traded within the violent far-right movement, and to what degree cryptocurrency is used in planning and carrying out an act of terrorism. Likewise, sanctions, listings, and proscriptions would aid in taking down a group or individual’s social media content, particularly where technology entities use sanctions lists as criteria for takedowns. For example, in April of 2020 when the Russian Imperial Movement (RIM) was designated as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT) entity along with three of the group’s leaders, YouTube and other social media platforms moved to have RIM’s accounts suspended. However, it is important to recognize the limitations of this tactic, as RIM still operates social media accounts on other less regulated platforms, like Telegram. Furthermore, over the past 20 years, terrorist organizations designated by the U.S. and allies, as well as sanctioned under the UN “1267” counterterrorism regime, have continued to innovate to maintain a presence online and skirt social media censorship. Therefore, it is important that governments and social media platforms continue to work closely with, as well as utilize, resources and research from initiatives such as Tech Against Terrorism to understand terrorist organizations and extremists’ use of social media platforms.

For countering tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) like 3D-printing of firearms, sanctions, proscriptions, and listings may not offer the most effective means of constraining behaviors. However, if an individual is providing material support or is

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29 Speakers at a virtual roundtable organized by The Soufan Center with the Airey Neave Trust highlighted the importance of the different implications of designations and proscriptions, with the latter making mere membership in the group a criminal offense; many designations processes, such as that under 1267, for example, did not make mere membership in Al-Qaeda or ISIS illegal. For more see: https://thesoufancenter.org/projects/deterrence-and-denial-the-impact-of-sanctions-and-designations-on-violent-far-right-groups/.


affiliated with a proscribed organization, these tools can allow law enforcement to detect the dissemination of instructions or the process of printing 3D weapons. For example, in January 2022, four U.K. citizens accused of being members of a proscribed violent far-right group were also charged with illegally 3D-printing firearms.33

Lastly, it is important to recognize that sanctions, listings, and proscriptions are not the only avenues to counter or mitigate the harnessing of emerging technology by the violent far-right movement. Regulation will likely be a more important component. In the case of the 3D-printing of firearms, for example, how-to instructions found online are not necessarily disseminated by the violent far-right or other violent extremists, but also gun-enthusiast networks.34 Experts attending the TSC roundtable discussion in Washington, D.C., highlighted the importance of implementing already existing anti-money laundering tools to limit the use of cryptocurrencies and virtual currencies by violent far-right groups.35 There are already cryptocurrency companies that have taken specific steps to curb extremist activities on their platforms. For example, in 2017, the publicly traded cryptocurrency exchange Coinbase reportedly blocked transfers to the neo-Nazi website, The Daily Stormer. In 2022, Coinbase’s user agreement explicitly prohibited uses that “encourage hate, racial intolerance, or violent acts against others.”36

TREND #2: RECRUITMENT OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Several governments, practitioners, and experts have highlighted the disturbing trend of children and youth being radicalized and recruited into violent far-right ideologies, networks, and groups. In March 2022, the U.K.’s head of counterterrorism policing warned about a rise in the number of youths becoming caught up in far-right extremism; 20 children were arrested last year, 19 of whom were linked to violent far-right extremism; 20 children were arrested last year, 19 of whom were linked to violent far-right ideologies. In 2021, Dutch counter-terrorism agency NCTV warned that hundreds of teenagers may have become radicalized by the far-right “accelerationist” movement, posing a potential future terrorism threat.37 Indeed, academics and experts have warned about how violent far-right networks and groups—largely operating online using a variety of tactics—specifically target children


and youth for radicalization, a risk that has only increased due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the resultant increase in time spent online.38 A study by the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR) also highlighted the phenomenon of youth-on-youth radicalization within the violent far-right movement. The study examined 10 far-right youth groups from across Western Europe, noting that all groups that “have emerged since 2018, have an average membership age of under 25 and are associated with arrests for hate crimes, incitement to violence or acts of violence.”39 Indeed, in the U.K., several teenagers belonging to proscribed groups like National Action, the Sonnenkrieg Division (SKD), and Feuerkrieg Division (FKD) have been arrested and charged with terrorism over the past years. Last year, a boy who was only 14 years old when he became head of the British cell of FKD was convicted of terrorism charges,40 also raising questions about the nature of leadership in such organizations.

A combination of factors, radicalization, and recruitment tactics make children and youth attractive targets for grooming within the violent far-right movement. Like within all violent extremist movements, children and youth are seen as easily manipulated and ripe for indoctrination, with a view to potentially carry out acts of violence. The U.S.-based neo-Nazi organization The Base has actively targeted adolescents for recruitment across Europe.41 Within the violent far-right network, specifically, the online eco-system and culture is attractive to children and youth. Memes, video games, “gamification” of live-streamed terrorist attacks, music, clothing brands, and fitness groups all create a sense of belonging and community, albeit with hate and violence at the center. Children and youth are also more tech-savvy and have managed to leverage emerging technology, like social media, to their advantage—avoiding censorship and creating online spaces where hate and violence becomes mainstream—thus enabling “youth-on-youth” radicalization. Patrik Hermansson, a researcher with Hope Not Hate focused on the U.K. right-wing movement, noted that the U.K. is often highlighted as a case study of the growing threat of youth recruitment and radicalization into the violent far-right movement, because the data exists in the U.K. to illustrate the trend. In Hermansson’s experience, however, this is not exclusively a U.K. problem, as he has observed young people from all over Europe being attracted to violent far-right groups and ideologies. Most worrisome is the attractiveness of accelerationist ideology among adolescents in the violent far-right


movement, as it emphasizes the need to break down what already exists to start anew.\footnote{Interview with Patrik Hermansson, June 14, 2022.}

Sanctions, listings, and proscriptions of violent far-right groups and individuals are potentially useful tools to limit or counter the recruitment of children and youth. Most obviously, proscriptions, listings, and sanctions can serve as a deterrence for children and youth to associate with or seek membership in an organization for fear of prosecution. All FVEY countries consider their legal mechanism for terrorism listings, proscriptions, or sanctions to have the goal of deterring membership. Hermansson explained that the U.K.’s proscription of violent far-right groups have, at least anecdotally, served as a deterrent against organizations like the Feuerkrieg Division (FKD), by advising online that prospective members with U.K. citizenship should think twice before applying for membership. Hermansson warned, however, that proscribing a group is not always a deterrent, as it can also serve to add “clout” or cachet for members of the group.\footnote{Ibid.}

If the deterrence factor fails, it presents governments with the option of arrest and prosecution to prevent acts of violence—though that presents unique challenges due to the legal statuses of minors. Despite the U.K. being one of the FVEY countries with the most proscribed violent far-right groups, the involvement of children and youth in violent far-right activity appears to only be increasing—illustrating the limitations of proscription of groups as a tool to prevent radicalization and mobilization to violence. Indeed, critics of the U.K.’s terrorism laws have voiced concerns about the country’s adopted hard line on viewing and downloading terrorist content online. This could have negative consequences where children get caught up in terrorism investigations or are inadvertently targeted by counterterrorism measures despite not having had malicious intent, and thus lose faith in the system and government.\footnote{“Radicalisation and Extremism - How Children May Be at Risk,” Devon Children and Families Partnership, accessed July 13, 2022, https://www.dcfp.org.uk/child-abuse/radicalisation-and-extremism/} It is important that actual mental health programming and other efforts be deployed as a first preventative response to safeguard minors, and that arrest and prosecution is not the go-to solution. The European Union (EU) Radicalization Awareness Network has also published a list of policy recommendations on how to actively engage youth in prevention programming, instead of treating children and youth as a “problem” when it comes to countering violent extremism.

\textbf{TREND #3: THE TRANSNATIONALIZATION OF THE MOVEMENT}

While violent far-right individuals have sported transnational ties to likeminded individuals and organizations throughout history, the movement has, until recently, been largely associated with national identity and activities. In recent years, however, this has changed and governments, practitioners, academics, and researchers have all highlighted the increased transnational nature of the
contemporary violent far-right movement. The U.S. Office of the Director of National Intelligence noted in a 2021 domestic violent extremism (DVE) threat assessment that “U.S. [Racially and Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremists (REME)] who promote the superiority of the white race are the [Domestic Violent Extremist] actors with the most persistent and concerning transnational connections because individuals with similar ideological beliefs exist outside of the United States and these [extremists] frequently communicate with and seek to influence each other.” The UN Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) declared in April 2020 that it had been “alerted by Member States to their increasing concern at the growing and increasingly transnational threat posed by extreme right-wing terrorism.”

Technology has been an aiding force for transnational ties—ideologically, financially, and operationally—allowing for grievances, ideas, goods, and TTPs to travel across borders. The most potent aspect of this network can be found in how a far-right mass-casualty terrorist attack in Norway inspired a deadly attack in New Zealand, which in turn inspired several terrorist attacks in the United States. The inspiration for and call to violence within the movement has thus become transnational, largely facilitated by technology. This highlights the important potential for sanctions measures to play a role in limiting the access of known terrorists to technology platforms and communications channels to further incite or radicalize others to violence. The transnationalization of organizations within the movement also illustrates this relatively new trend. U.S.-based neo-Nazi organizations have established cells and inspired affiliated organizations in countries from Canada to Australia. This is also reflected in the sanctions, listings, and proscriptions of

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49 Discussions with senior counterterrorism officials in New Zealand highlighted the importance of sanctions measures in impeding the access and communications of designated entities, particularly individuals, in an effort to stem the prospects for further incitement and mobilization. Interview, senior counterterrorism officials, New Zealand, June 2022.

violent far-right groups and individuals in FVEY countries—many of which are originally U.S.-based groups or off-shoots of U.S. groups. There are also cases of violent far-right individuals who travel to connect with likeminded individuals, often at events such as conferences, concerts, or protests. In some cases, individuals have traveled to gain battlefield experience in conflict zones.\(^{51}\)

Transnationalization has also allowed for increased opportunity for fundraising activities online and the sale of merchandise and far-right paraphernalia. U.S. white supremacist Robert Rundo actively promotes his brand through social media platforms like Telegram, selling merchandise to individuals across Europe, including members of the Nordic Resistance Movement.\(^{52}\) FVEY countries and other allies could build groups of like-minded states “to champion mechanisms that build a comprehensive sanctions regime that is less a patchwork and thus, serves as a force multiplier.”\(^{53}\)

Without U.S. participation in sanctioning and designating violent far-right organizations, entities, and individuals, countering or mitigating the threat posed by the transnationalization of the movement will be difficult. However, the U.S. Government has noted that:

“The structure of the transnational [REMVE] movement is fluid, and oftentimes intentionally leaderless, where groups – should they exist – often lack clear command and control structures. This is, by design, a well-honed tactic of the movement to evade law enforcement efforts in the United States and abroad. Therefore, designating REMVE groups and/or their members under U.S. counterterrorism authorities remains extremely challenging due to a lack of reliable and credible information about their organizational structures, which is critical in assessing key facts including, for example, whether activities of an individual who claims some sort of undefined affiliation to, or association


\(^{52}\) Screenshot from Nordic Resistance Movement-linked Telegram chat, March 4, 2021.

\(^{53}\) For more on this topic, see the other Briefs in this series and in particular, Colin P. Clarke, "Lessons Learned from the 1267 Sanctions Regime against Al-Qaeda and Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS),” The Soufan Center, July 28, 2022, https://thesoufancenter.org/projects/deterrence-and-denial-the-impact-of-sanctions-and-designations-on-violent-far-right-groups/
with, a group can be attributed to the organization.”

Additionally, the United States has limitations to its terrorism sanction and designation regime, preventing it from applying it to groups with majority U.S. membership, given the nature of constitutional protections.

While Canada, the U.K., and New Zealand have listed and proscribed U.S. groups that are important nodes in the transnational network of the violent far-right movement, these listings and proscriptions have a limited ability to hamper the ideological, financial, and operational aspects of groups in the absence of U.S. measures. For example, Canada’s listing of the U.S. violent far-right group the Proud Boys indeed prevents the organization from having a bank account in Canada. However, since this group largely operates from the United States, it is not clear how useful the Canada listing has been in financially hurting the group. What's more, research suggests that the Proud Boys changed the organization’s name in Canada. This is an inherent shortcoming of terrorism listings, proscriptions, and sanctions that was raised by experts and practitioners from FVEY countries during roundtable discussions hosted by TSC, namely that groups frequently change their names to circumvent sanctions, listings, or proscriptions. In order to address this challenge, the U.K., for example, has made concerted efforts to amend the proscription of violent far-right groups, like National Action, to include different re-iterations of the group’s name.

It is important to note that the application of sanctions, listings, and proscriptions against violent far-right groups also carries the weight of signaling, to the international community, allies, and partners, a country’s willingness to combat a specific terrorism threat. During TSC’s roundtable discussions, experts and practitioners raised the issue of the notable lack of United States designations of violent far-right groups as FTOs or Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT) entities, with the exception of the Russian Imperial Movement (RIM). This stands in particularly stark contrast to the United States’ leading

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58 Roundtable Discussion, hosted by The Soufan Center, Washington, D.C., May 24, 2022; Roundtable Discussion, hosted by The Soufan Center, Virtual, June 29, 2022.
role in designating Salafi-jihadist groups as FTOs.

One solution for the U.S. to apply sanctions against violent far-right groups, while adhering to domestic legislation and upholding protections of the constitution, is to target foreign violent far-right groups and individuals. In June 2022, New Zealand adopted such an approach when listing the “American Proud Boys.” Further, an international sanctions expert and researcher interviewed for this brief suggested that the United States should be more creative in its approach to apply sanctions that could potentially disrupt the violent far-right transnational network. For example, the potential financial ties between sanctioned individuals under the Global Magnitsky Act and violent far-right groups or individuals could be a useful avenue. This could potentially prove especially useful in disrupting western violent far-right groups’ and individuals’ ties to Russian groups and individuals sanctioned originally for human rights abuses and corruption. According to the U.K. Parliament’s report on Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism, “Russia has a longstanding history of using proxy actors to exert political influence and cause social unrest, and it is highly likely that it perceives exerting influence via Far-Right groups as an effective way to exacerbate tensions in the West.”

TREND #4: IDEOLOGICAL CONVERGENCE

One of the challenges within the contemporary violent far-right movement is the diversity of ideologies that motivate violence but cannot be simply categorized. While violence is an underpinning factor within the movement, an individual or group can be motivated by a list of perceived grievances, conspiracy theories, and ideologies. Moreover, government officials and experts have noted the phenomenon of what terrorism expert Bruce Hoffman has labeled “ideological convergence” take root in the movement. This has also been frequently described as a

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61 TSC-conducted interview on July 7, 2022 with an international sanctions expert and researcher.


TRENDS IN VIOLENT FAR-RIGHT EXTREMISM

potentially mobilizes toward an act of violence motivated by a wide range of ideologies that overlap, converge, or even contradict one another.65

These different ideological elements still inform an extremist belief system that underpins violence as a political solution. One of the most common examples of ideological convergence is that of eco-fascism. This ideology blends what may be considered traditional violent far-right and traditional extreme left-wing ideologies with one caveat: the perseverence of the environment for the perceived white race.66 Eco-fascists also frequently blame minorities and ethnic groups for the degradation of the environment. Several far-right terrorists have included eco-fascist ideology in their manifestos, including the 2019 Christchurch mosque shooter, the 2019 El Paso shooter, and the 2022 Buffalo shooter.67 Another example of ideological convergence is that of neo-Nazi groups, like the Atomwaffen Division and the Base, venerating Salafi-jihadist groups, attacks, and leaders, like Osama bin Laden.68 The affinity between the violent far-right movement and Salafi-jihadism was on full display following the U.S.

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withdrawal from Afghanistan and the subsequent take-over by the Taliban. In an online encrypted chat forum, accelerationists celebrated what they considered the defeat of the U.S. military and the global world order, admiring the Taliban’s accomplishments with some arguing that it was a “sign” of what would happen when they eventually take up arms against their own governments.69 The ideological convergence of the violent far-right movement presents a unique threat to governments, societies, law enforcement, and the intelligence community. Chiefly, because the threat is difficult to define and, in large part, lacks the organizational structures with which many seasoned counter-terrorism professional are familiar.

Sanctions, listings, and proscriptions may not prove particularly useful in countering or limiting the threat posed by ideological convergence, unless a single individual or group consistently posed a similar threat while justifying them with different narratives. The United States and allies are still struggling with defining a terminology for the extreme and violent far-right, with the U.S. labeling it “DVE” (domestic violent extremism) and reflecting different ideologies ranging from REMVE to Militia Violent Extremism (MVE) and Conspiracy-driven violent extremism, to name a few. The U.S. is, however, unusual in differentiating between domestic and international terrorism, reflected in the challenges with regard to terminology. In the U.K., it has now been named “Extreme Right Wing Terrorism” (ERWT),70 while European countries may refer to it as right-wing extremism. Australia, New Zealand, and Canada utilize some variation of ideologically-motivated violent extremism.71 Ideological convergence further complicates the efforts of speaking a common language to describe a growing terrorism threat. The U.K. Parliament Report on Extreme Right Wing Terrorism published on 13 July, 2022, stressed the importance of a common terminology to define the threat, including for prosecution purposes.72

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Consider designating foreign violent far-right groups and individuals under either U.S. FTO or E.O. 13224 designation authorities: While the nature of the violent far-right movement complicates the potential applicability of sanctions, listings, and proscriptions, several experts


have stressed that an important aspect of these tools to counter terrorism is to signal ideological agnosticism when dealing with political violence. The United States should determine whether any non-U.S. based individuals or groups on the U.K., Canadian, New Zealand, or Australian terrorist lists can be sanctioned under either its FTO or E.O. 13224 designation authorities. It will also be important for the United States to inventory and, where applicable, utilize other sanctions regimes to disrupt the transnational violent far-right network. For example, the United States should consider investigating potential financial ties between individuals sanctioned under the Global Magnitsky Act and violent far-right groups and individuals. The U.S. could also work diplomatically with other states, particularly FVEYs partners, to support listings in other countries to further circumscribe the operating space for far-right terrorists in partner states.

2. **Innovate to develop additional forms of regulations to counter the violent far-right, beyond sanctions:** Sanctions, listings, and proscriptions will not exclusively curb the trends that currently define the contemporary violent far-right movement. Apart from utilizing these authorities, it will also be important for FVEY countries to continue to innovate on other forms of regulations—such as the 3D printing of guns, anti-money laundering regulations on cryptocurrencies, and social media regulatory frameworks—to complement sanctions, listings, and proscriptions where necessary. For example, incorporating financial technology companies in the membership and mandates of organizations like the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT) and Tech Against Terrorism.

3. **Focus on strengthening cooperation among FVEY countries in countering the threat from far-right terrorism:** The landscape remains largely understudied as compared to other forms of violent ideologies, especially Salafi-jihadism, which also hampers the understanding and effectiveness of analysts, law enforcement, prevention experts, and other frontline practitioners in responding to key and emerging trends that facilitate violence. In addition, as illustrated by the findings of this brief, the threat is also rapidly evolving. As such, increased funding and resources to research the evolving violent far-right landscape will be key to formulate and implement evidence-based policy recommendations. For example, FVEY countries should consider establishing an informal forum to share information, intelligence, trends, best practices, and connect frontline practitioners with one another, as well as relevant international partners like the United Nations and the Global Counter-terrorism Forum.

4. **Strengthen international cooperation efforts to counter the narratives of the violent far-right movement:** The “mainstreaming” of violent far-right narratives, coupled with the phenomenon of ideological convergence, present challenges for how to prevent recruitment and radicalization within the movement, especially of vulnerable populations such as youths. Apart from signaling accountability by sanctioning, listing, or proscribing violent far-right groups and individuals as terrorists, it will also be important that FVEY countries cooperate with other stake-holders, such as the European Union and the United Nations, to counter extremist narratives, including incitement to terrorism, while also learning from past experiences about what works — and
what doesn’t. For example, the EU Radicalization Awareness Network has pushed for more inclusion of youth in policy-making and the development of prevention practices. Building on international efforts to counter incitement and terrorist narratives, promote youth, peace, and security agenda, and strengthen the roles of civil society organizations, frequently engaged in critical prevention and rehabilitation efforts, will be a key component of collective efforts to address violent far-right extremism, in individual states as well as the transnational dimensions.

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Project Resources, Publications, and Events

For all materials relating to this project, including events summaries, publications, and related resources, please visit the TSC website at www.soufancenter.org:
ABOUT TSC:

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.

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