

HITLER YOUTHS

THE RISE OF TEENAGE FAR-RIGHT TERRORISTS



A HOPE NOT HATE REPORT
SEPTEMBER 2020

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INTRODUCTION: GROOMED TO HATE

This report sheds light on a dangerous and tragic emerging trend within the international extreme far-right. In recent years, HOPE not have have increasingly noticed children and teenagers being drawn into the movement online. They are fed extreme literature and ideas by older members and ultimately exploited to expand the reach of far-right groups and to advance the often violent goals of the groups they join.

Children as young as 12 and 13 years old are being drawn into extreme far-right circles where they find a warm welcome from existing, and often older, activists. Once inside they are urged to consume extreme far-right propaganda texts, ask their friends to join and subsequently exploited by the group to appeal to an ever younger audience.

The phenomenon of extremely young activists is most worrying when they become active in directly terror propagating groups. Sadly, even here, children are actively welcomed by older members, with their low age being seen as positive as they are more influenceable. “The younger you start the better”, wrote the admin of a small but extreme Discord chat group earlier this spring, after a member saying they were just 13 years old had joined.

While some young activists are brought in by peers or join by their own accord, the fact that adult extremists welcome and then educate them is a form of grooming that makes many of these children victims. Becoming active in extreme far-right politics has potentially severe consequences for their futures if they become regular members of groups advocating violence and racism. Children and teenagers are urged to choose careers based on how to promote the interests of the far right.

As well as being victims however, they are also still engaging in harmful behaviour that negatively affects society and people who they directly target.

We provide examples of young people online that portray themselves as older than they actually are, likely in order to get respect from older members. The ease at which one can create an alternate persona on social media

means that tables can be turned and children, pretending to be adults, can push peers and older people to commit violent acts.

In this report we also expose a new extreme right pro-terror group, The British Hand, which is led by a 15 year old in Derby, although to members he says that he is 17. In private chats, the boy is urging his group members to commit violent attacks on migrants in Dover and says that he himself is planning an attack soon. The group discusses how to acquire weapons and how to hide their political views in order to enlist in the military. It is also glorifying previous far-right terrorists, including now proscribed National Action.

The trend raises the urgent question of how we counter grooming of young people by the far right. Social media has clearly made it easier for children to be exposed to far-right propaganda online, it has also made children more vulnerable to far-right grooming and active participation in the far-right. The fact that they can engage with the far right online without raising alarm from their peers, teacher or parents complicates the issue of responding to radicalisation as it might not be easy to detect by those around them.

TEENAGE FAR-RIGHT TERRORISTS

Earlier this year an Estonian nazi made headlines as the leader of Feuerkrieg Division (FKD). The group gained notoriety on the messaging app Telegram because of its extreme content and calls for terrorism by a leader who called himself “Commander”. Such terror-advocating, decentralised nazi networks have become increasingly common over the past two years, and FKD soon had members in several European countries and North America. Commander posted pictures of himself in what looked like combat gear, bragged about his extensive collection of far-right literature and urged other users to bomb federal buildings. Unknown to the group’s members, however, Commander was just 13 years old.¹

Last autumn, a British FKD member was arrested leading to the group threatening police officers and demanding their release. On its Telegram channels the group posted a list of police officers’ home addresses and published images of Dave Thompson, chief constable of the West Midlands, with a gun to his head and the words “race traitor” written across his eyes. The arrested FKD activist turned out to be just 16 years old.

Now HOPE not hate can reveal a new extreme right terrorist group, The British Hand, is led by a 15 year old from Derby and mainly made up of teenagers.

Children as young as 12 and 13 years old are getting active in terror advocating groups online. Both victims and perpetrators, children engage in spreading far-right propaganda and harassing minorities, but are also groomed into the movement by older members and their presence exploited to make the far-right more appealing to a younger audience.

That Commander was barely a teenager came as a surprise to many who had observed his fervent rage and hate online, as well as many of his own peers who posted pictures of themselves in front of FKD flags in the UK and US. But Commander is not the only 13 years old in a terror-advocating far-right chat group on communication apps like Telegram and Discord.

“THE YOUNGER YOU START THE BETTER”

“Well any age is welcome to learn here. The younger you start the better”, wrote the admin



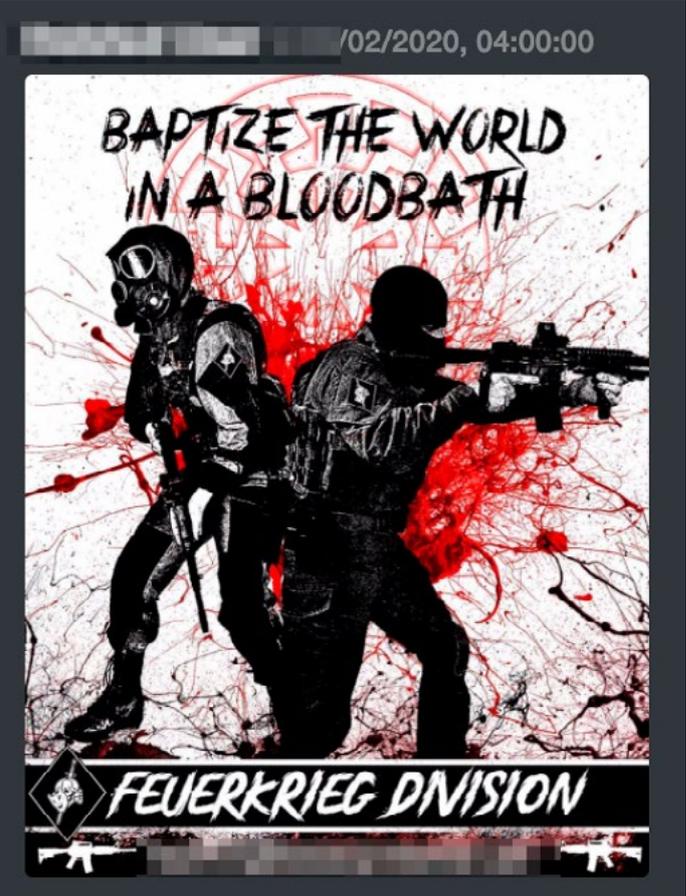
of a small but extreme Discord server earlier this spring, after a new member had admitted to being 13 years old. Although, in a separate chat





[redacted] • 17/02/2020, 12:53:26 • [Jump to message](#)

who should i make my gta 5 online character?
brenton tarrant
sam woodward
or charles manson?



that same recruit said that he was “12 [and] a quarter” years old.

The Discord group has now been deleted, but the archived conversations show an extreme chat group with virulently racist material, open glorification of terrorism and direct calls for violence. Users are encouraged to read texts from Iron March, a now defunct fascist forum known for its promotion of violence and being the birthplace of terrorist

group Atomwaffen Division, and inspiration for several others.

This is only made more disturbing by how accepting and supportive the group is of having children as members. While young recruits appear to be questioned somewhat more thoroughly in regards to the sincerity of their dedication, they are not barred from entry. In this chat there are at least three members who said that they are under 15 years old.

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In another chat with approximately 400, mostly British, members on Telegram, another user identifies himself as being 13 years old.

As opposed to the Discord server, this group doesn't vet new members, and the 13 year old starts off bluntly by saying that he is looking for "gay chats". Considering the harsh tone of this chat, it is not surprising that he is misunderstood and ridiculed, as the group believed him to be gay himself. But he clarifies: "I want to tell gays to kill themselves". The clarification ends the abuse and one user directs him to gay far-right figure, Milo Yiannopoulos' chat. "Go to milos chats it's full of gays", one person responds.

ONLINE FAR RIGHT YOUTH CULTURE

That young people have been part of the far-right and extremist groups is not new, and young men have long made up a significant portion of the users in far-right spaces online. The Alternative Right made headlines for appealing to a young audience in the run up to the 2016 US Presidential election, partially explained by its presence online and its use of humour to make its racist ideas more palatable. In 2005, one of few opinion surveys looking at far-right support among children found that Britons in the (admittedly wide) age group 11 to 21 were seven times more likely to support the BNP than the rest of the population.

These examples could be taken as evidence that support for the far right among young people is a stage that one goes through but then grows out of, driven more by rebellion than genuine ideological conviction. Cynthia Miller-Idriss,

who has studied far-right youth culture, argues that expressing far-right ideas and taking on its imagery and language "may provide agency for youth who feel constrained or let down by the adult world" and that "far-right engagement may thus be thought of as a mode of resistance and cultural subversion" for young people.

Based on Miller-Idriss' argument it is easy to see how chat app Telegram, currently a popular platform for the far right, is also a place where one can come across many very young people. Public group chats on the platform are often marked by extreme speech veiled in humour. Users commonly find entertainment in an never-ending competition of making the most extreme ideas humoristic and making the most insensitive jokes possible. Transgressing boundaries is essential and often a requirement for admittance, moderators often prompt new members to post a racist meme as they enter the chat in order to make sure they are genuine.

Moreover, the platform is largely anonymous and unmoderated. Finding chats is easy, which makes it a useful platform to bring in new followers to the far-right. Several large groups on the platform have thousands of members and are easy to join. They often combine propaganda for far-right groups with much less serious conversation. The humour hides the underlying seriousness of the messages and the interspersing far-right propaganda, making it easy to excuse as jokes.

REAL CONSEQUENCES

It is an understandable assumption that many will move on from the political views they held as children; however, this is to minimise a serious issue. Are memes urging people to blow up places of worship, which a Swedish 14 year old produced and posted on Telegram, or "jokes" about killing "600 gays", as another 13 year-old wrote in a British Telegram chat in December, comparable to other forms of teenage rebellion? What happens when those views are expressed online, and therefore less likely to be countered by parents, other adults or friends who disagree around them? Neither of these questions have straight forward answers, but the negative impact of children engaging in the far right is real for others, and likely for themselves.

Intent is hard to decipher online, a problem that trolls have used themselves to cause confusion and cause outsized media reactions. But however one views the sincerity of the ideological conviction of users online, it doesn't change the effect of spreading far-right propaganda and threats. For the consumers of extremist



I'm 13

20/02/2020, 21:58:49

14 turning 15

20/02/2020, 21:58:29

Wait how old is he?

20/02/2020, 21:58:33

13

20/02/2020, 22:05:24 • [Jump to message](#)

, got held back so he is in the same grade as me 7th

propaganda, it makes little difference if it is a 13 year old or a 30 year old advocating for attacks on synagogues. Most people that make threats online are not going to take physical action, but all the same, it only takes one person to carry out a deadly terror attack. The incessant cheerleading for such actions, as well as the spreading of bomb-making and terror manuals on Telegram channels, lowers the hurdle for someone to take violent action.

As witnessed by the case of the 13 year old in Telegram chat, who wanted to find gay people to harrass, to the targets of online harassment, which are often vulnerable communities, the effect of that harassment can be severe no matter the intent or age of the attacker. But that the harassment happens online rather than offline is probably partially an explanation for why the 13 year old express such extreme ideas.

Social media, including communities in multiplayer games, also make it easier for children and teenagers to find others that share similar views as them. The aforementioned Discord server is an example of a space where very young people, already with some level of conviction of far-right ideas, can meet and talk with older far-right sympathisers who are more well read than themselves and receive guidance on what books to read and think of current events. The now-deleted Discord server is also an example of how young peoples far-right engagement can go beyond trolling and causing outrage for entertainment's sake, as there is no audience nor victims in a secret chat group.

As with Commander in the FKD, there are multiple examples of how what might have begun as online activism has led to terror crimes, including in the UK. Last year a 16 year old from Durham was convicted of planning a terrorist attack , and had attempted to order bomb making materials from a contact in the US. He is the youngest person to be convicted of planning terrorism in the UK. The teenager wrote about race war and listed locations he planned to attack in his personal notes, and described himself as a “natural sadist”.

In the autumn, two trials of a 15 and a 16 year old for terrorism related-charges are coming up in the UK. Both are alleged to have been involved in the FKD, the group run by the 13 year old Estonian boy. The ease at which one can create an alternate persona on social media means that tables can be turned and children, pretending to be adults, can push peers and older people to commit violent acts.

GROOMING

Adult far-right activists recognise young people as the future of their movement. During the pandemic, far-right groups, among them British fascist group Patriotic Alternative (PA), have seized on the opportunity to lobby for homeschooling, a practice that far-right activists have long found attractive as they view the public school system as an institution that indoctrinates children into left-wing and progressive beliefs. In the words of leader of PA,

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Mark Collet, who newly became a father himself:

We want to help people out of the left-wing liberal establishment educational system, we want to help people out of that so their children aren't being indoctrinated with social and political narratives that go against what we believe in, that go against our moral fabric, that go against our political outlook. And we also want to get kids away from this horrible horrible brainwashing.

The fact that those best suited to bring in young people to the far right are young people themselves has not been lost on the far right. A PA-related live stream channel let a British teenager appear in its streams since he was 15 years old (currently 16) and to host a special "ZOOMER NIGHT" episodes aimed at the generation born from late 1990s to early 2010s. One of the UK's largest far-right youtubers Dangerfield has similarly done a nine part live stream series called "Talking with teens" where he interviews far-right teenagers.

This case as well as the aforementioned Discord server, where children are actively encouraged to join with the explicit knowledge about their age by older members, shows a worrying willingness to make children active advocates and members by fascist organisations. "The younger you start the better", as the leader of the Discord server wrote. It raises the urgent question on how we counter grooming of young people by the far right.

WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT

Social media has clearly made it easier for children to be exposed to far-right propaganda online, likewise it has also made children more vulnerable to far-right grooming. While these children should be seen as victims of the far right, we shouldn't look past the role of children in radicalising their peers and directing hate and abuse towards minorities online. In the case of the 13 year old in the Discord server, he writes that he was invited by a classmate. Highlighting how the line between online and offline engagement is blurred.

It is easy to lie on social media platforms, one can make oneself appear both older and younger than one really is and we won't get the full picture of children engaging in fascist groups online. However, frequent discussions of issues at school and related topics such as the GCSEs in some far-right chat groups indicate that the examples given in this article are not isolated cases.

The fact that many children can engage with the far right online without raising alarm from their peers, teacher or parents complicates the issue of dealing with their behaviour. Anonymity and distance between perpetrator and victim on social media makes it easier to engage in harassment, but the online world is not cut off from the offline. Solutions likely need to be many-fold, requiring teachers and parents to learn how to recognise the language of the far right today and recognise that expressions of racism and other forms of intolerance begets hate online.

NOTE

1 Since many of the accounts referenced in this article belong to minors, we have chosen to not include their usernames and some other details of the messages referenced as this could be used to identify them.

THE BRITISH HAND: NEW BRITISH EXTREME RIGHT TERROR CELL EXPOSED



A new far-right group advocating terror is recruiting minors to its ranks via Instagram and Telegram. A Derby-based 15 year old is the leader of the group and writes in private messages that he plans to attack migrants in Dover. The group discusses how to modify, make and acquire weapons and how to hide their political views in order to be able to enlist in the military.

The small cell, numbering as few as 15 young members, discuss having to go to school and what they'll do after graduating. Some of the groups members are already known to Prevent,

the government's programme to prevent radicalisation into violent extremism, and mockingly detail their meetings with the Police officers to other group members as they take place, only to return to recruiting members to their group online.

AN INSTAGRAM TERROR GROUP

The first post by The British Hand appeared on Instagram on 31 July. It disparaged the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement in posts



The HAND 🇬🇧✊
Right lads

I'm gonna delete this after 10 hours

I AM PLANNING A ATTACK AGAINST THE DOVER COAST WHERE EVERYY MUSLIM AND REFUGE HAS BEEN GIVEN SAFETY IF YOUR INTERESTED TELL ME NOW

HITLER YOUTHS: THE RISE OF TEENAGE FAR-RIGHT TERRORISTS

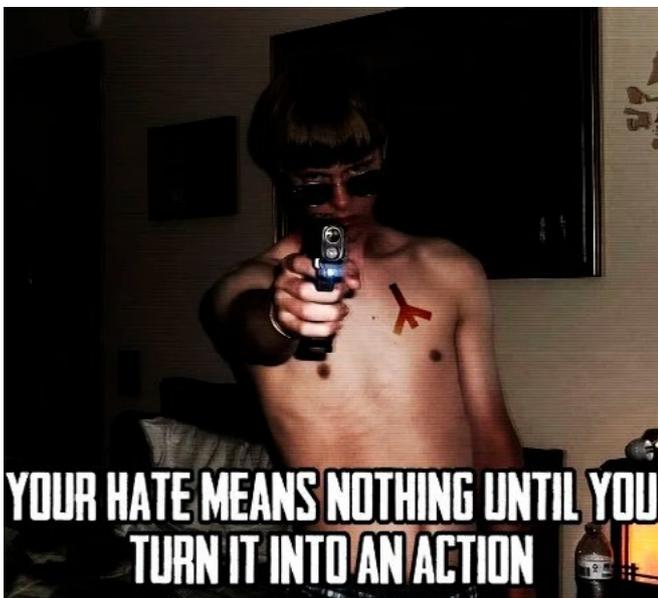
condoning violence against the anti-racist movement. One post reads “How real men ‘take a knee’” over an illustration of a soldier aiming a rifle. Another post alleges media bias in favour of the BLM movement and the left and that violence against white people is suppressed. A short voice recording from the leader four days later again emphasised how BLM and the rising salience of the topic of systemic racism against black people is part of his motivation to form the group:

They are dressed like paramilitary, and my point is I think we should do as well. But we need to show dominant force. The fact that these people are doing it in Britain [sic], this is our nation, not theirs. [...] If you live in Darby [sic], DM me. I’m going to create a group to deal with some shit.

TERROR THREATS

Although the members are relatively young and the group newly formed, its leader keeps calling for urgent and extreme action. He describes The British Hand as an: “ultranationalist” group and its main goals are “to get rid of Islam and those little blm fuckers”.

The group is rife with antisemitism but Muslims and migrants are their primary targets. Worryingly, the messages in their closed chat group show a consensus around the necessity for violence. When the leader posted that he was planning an attack against Dover migrants, he received support from other members in the group. Other members similarly stressed their willingness to commit violent attacks. One writes of Muslims in London that they are “gonna mow em down”.

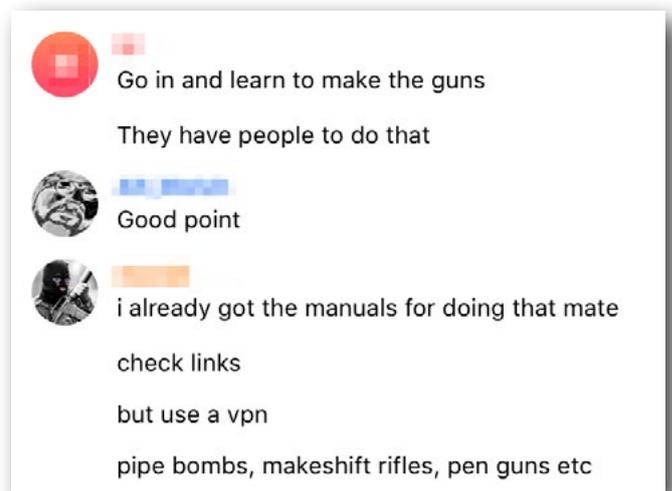


In line with other similar groups on the extreme far right the group consistently glorifies terrorists. Pictures of the 2011 Norwegian far-right mass murderer are interspersed between images of the 2015 Charleston church shooter, the 2019 Bærum mosque shooter, and the Christchurch terrorist who killed 51 people at two mosques in the same year. One member even claims he’s named a pet after the perpetrator of the latter. In another post, the leader of the group suggests that The British Hand are “gonna be bigger than them”, referring to the 2019 Christchurch and 2011 Norway killers.

On the group’s Instagram page and private group chats, videos of the Christchurch shooting are shared frequently alongside material relating to the now defunct and proscribed British terror group National Action (NA). One user calls himself “Free Renshaw”, referring to Jack Renshaw, a member of NA who planned to murder Labour MP Rosie Cooper. The user glorifies NA and writes that he “will most likely die fighting for what I love” and posts a picture of the Charleston church shooter aiming a gun at the camera.

WEAPONS AND THE ARMY

Especially worrying is the fact that the group has shared pictures of themselves at an airsoft gun range outside of Sheffield in propaganda meant to look like a paramilitary training. Airsoft is a hobby for some of the members in the group and while it is only a simulation of war involving replica guns, their interest in weapons does not end with plastic bullets. In the chat members discuss how airsoft guns can be modified to make them cause real harm and other ways to acquire real weapons and explosives online. In a message that was deleted just minutes after being sent, a user wrote: “Mate it’s a code. When we say airsoft we mean real weapons and shit”.





yeah balkan people tend to be a very headbutting bunch lmao

btw in about a year and a half i'll be joining the army, i'll try to meet up with any of you guys occasionally to train if i can
it's good to have the skills they teach you there



i can't wait to get to the army recruitment centre and they bring up my instagram account



i'm literally gonna wipe my phone and delete all my accounts before i enlist

Enlisting in the Army is a frequent discussion in the group with two members saying they have concrete plans of doing so. While some members argue that the Army does not represent them anymore, they agree on the view that the Army can teach them useful skills and in order to get enlisted, they'll have to hide their real political views.

The leader and one other member of the group also appears to be in the Army Cadets. One post on the leader's instagram uses the hashtag #armycadets and the other member mentions the Army Cadets as a place where he found friends who had similar political views as his own.

INSTAGRAM

Coverage of terrorist groups on social media has, for good reason, recently centered around Russian chat app Telegram and video-sharing sites such as YouTube. The largely unmoderated Telegram especially has been fertile ground for the emergence of explicitly violent groups in Europe and North America.

The British Hand diverged from this path as it originated on Instagram. Most members were recruited from Instagram rather than Telegram and while their Instagram accounts are banned relatively quickly it is still an effective outreach platform. The platform's recommendation feature prominently directs you to the group's main account if one starts following a member.

In the ongoing cat-and-mouse game between law enforcement, moderators, anti-racist activists and the far right, the latter have been forced to become adaptable. Especially violent groups are continuously moving between platforms. Instagram's focus on visual media rather than text and its young and mainstream user base means it is appropriate for groups like The British Hand whose propaganda is simple but simultaneously communicates extreme messages through images and videos.



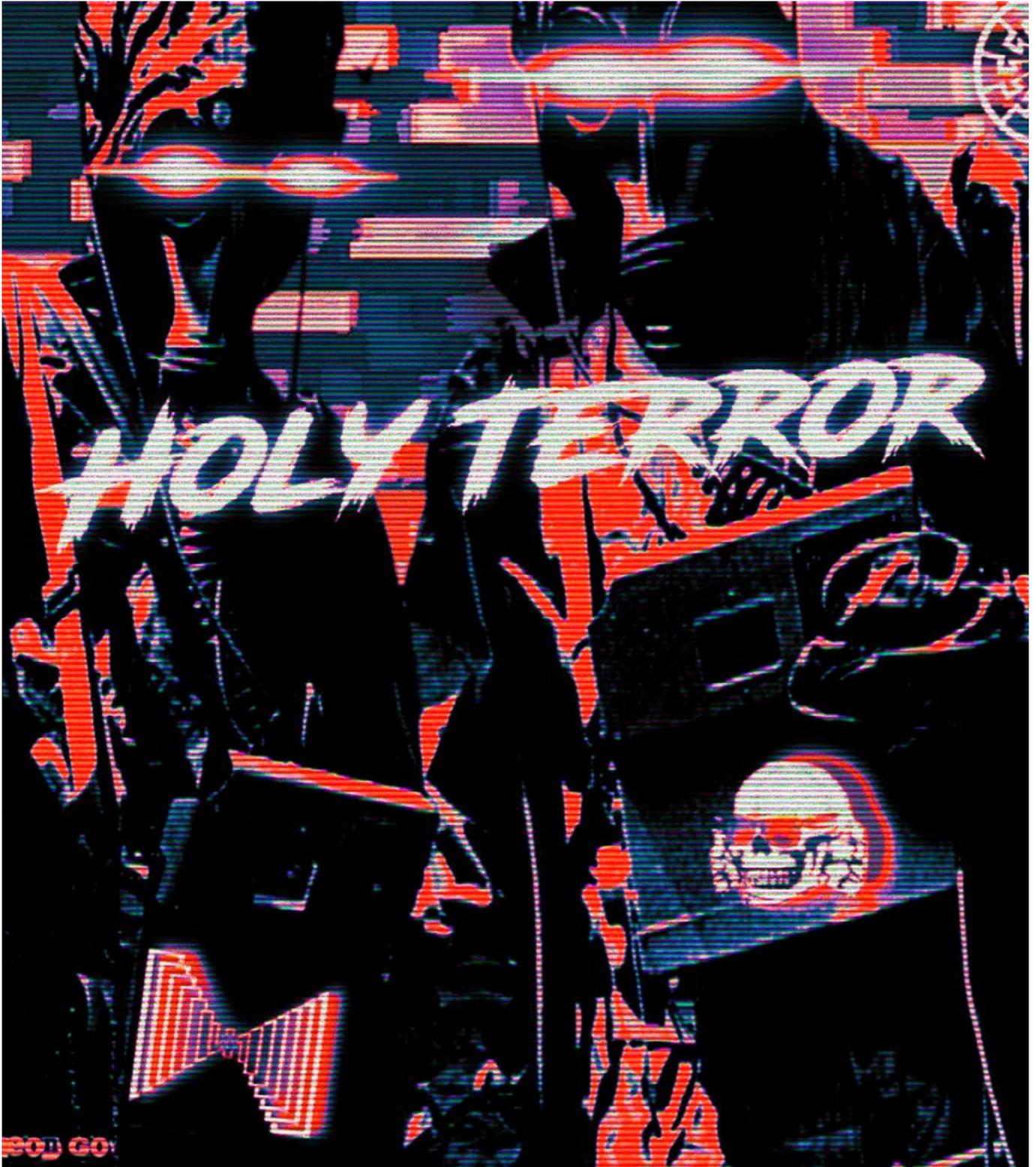
A CHANGING THREAT

The rate at which new, explicitly violent far-right groups are emerging online is worrying. The case of The British Hand highlights multiple specific threats posed by the modern far right. These groups pose a real threat of violence against minorities in Britain. While access to weapons remains a hurdle, it is an issue that far-right activists actively work to overcome, whether that is through buying on the dark web, the use of homemade weapons (as the shooter in Halle, Germany did in October last year) or through gaining access to weapons and weapons expertise in the military.

The young age of the members, and the leader, is part of another trend currently visible in the far right in the UK and abroad. Young people are using social media to reach out and promote their group and urge others to commit violence. Social media gives community to both positive and incredibly harmful activists, including those in the violent far right, and such small, insular groups, can be effective places for radicalisation.

THE TERRORGRAM NETWORK

BY DAVID LAWRENCE



manufacturing weapons, carrying out attacks and evading detection. Most such channels are in English or Ukrainian, although German and Spanish-speaking channels also exist; many of those in English appear to be USA-oriented, although a handful such as The British Hand are known to be UK-based. Whilst some channels are dedicated to specific extreme right organisations and others are to obscure variants of far-right terrorism, the most popular take a more broad approach and serve as feeds for all types of far-right, pro-terror content, heavily recycling posts from, and actively promoting, other Terrorgram channels. Whilst we can assume a large amount of crossover in followers across Terrorgram channels and groups, the biggest have accrued thousands of followers in under a year – significant numbers for outlets urging viewers to “Piss away any morals you have left” and take up arms.

A major preoccupation of Terrorgram is the worship of terrorists, who are canonized as “Saints”. Whilst, predictably, most of their pantheon consists of white supremacists, including the London nail bomber and the perpetrator of the 2011 Norway attacks, a surprisingly diverse range of killers are praised and discussed on Terrorgram, often used as case studies from which potential attackers can learn. For example, the Islamist terrorist who murdered 49 people at a gay nightclub in Florida in 2016 has been dubbed a “hero”, and an African-American man who led a nine-day campaign of shootings against the police in 2013 has been celebrated. The Provisional IRA is often glorified for its longevity, tactical sophistication and aesthetics. Even the Zodiac serial killer, who murdered at least five people in the 1960s and 1970s, has been praised for his ability to evade capture, and Jim Jones, a cult leader who led over 900 to mass suicide, was included in a “leader board” of “Saints” for the sheer numbers he took to the grave. The celebration of such figures reveals the bleak nihilism underpinning Terrorgram; for many the capacity for death is the highest virtue, and political or religious alignment is secondary.

Of course, the modern terroristic nazi scene predates Terrorgram. One major influence is the now-defunct nazi forum Iron March (IM), linked to both the proscribed UK-based nazi terror group National Action (NA), and the USA-founded Atomwaffen Division (AWD). Despite having little over 1,200 users when it folded in November 2017, the forum has had an outsized influence on modern nazism. In particular, IM popularised *SIEGE* by veteran American nazi James Mason, a work promoting

the establishment of underground, leaderless terrorist cells, working towards destabilising society and ushering in revolution. IM was also key in the development of the “terrorwave” aesthetic, a distinctive and deeply menacing form of visual propaganda that succinctly communicates a message of terrorist violence. Usually rendered in red, white and black, the style often incorporates images of historical fascists, terrorists or paramilitaries wearing skull masks, alongside esoteric far-right symbols and simple but extreme slogans (such as “TRAITORS WILL HANG” and “RAPE THE POLICE”). The influence of IM on Terrorgram is profound, and the philosophies of *SIEGE* and the terrorwave aesthetic are ubiquitous across Terrorgram channels.

Whilst all are unequivocally dedicated to decentralised terrorism, there is a degree of ideological variation within the Terrorgram circuit. There are several channels dedicated to “eco-fascism”, a loose and intensely antisemitic far-right scene that emphasises a mystical connection to the land, the violent enforcement of animal rights, and often genocidal solutions to the issue of overpopulation. The scene became increasingly visible during 2019, in part due to the Christchurch killer self-identifying as an eco-fascist, and the El Paso killer using eco-fascist arguments in his manifesto.

There is a strong strain of esotericism and occultism woven into Terrorgram propaganda, lending a mystic sheen to the movement. Esoteric Hitlerism is frequently referenced, a bizarre pseudo-religion cooked up by postwar Nazi zealot Savitri Devi, who co-opted elements of Hinduism and alleged that Hitler was an incarnation of the god Vishnu.

ORGANISING

Most worryingly, Telegram has extended the reach of an array of international terroristic organisations, some of which continue to announce new cells in Europe, Australasia and North America. The platform has also played midwife to several new terroristic groups in recent years, some of which, whilst small, are establishing cells offline, committing hate crimes and threatening public officials.

AWD remains a looming presence on Terrorgram. Founded by IM users in 2015, the group was the first of a new generation of nazis to embrace the philosophies of *SIEGE*, and has been linked to five murders in the US. Whilst it has suffered crackdowns and numerous arrests in recent years, cells outside of the USA continue to broadcast its message. In October, a pre-

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existing Telegram channel with thousands of followers announced itself “the official channel for THE ATOMWAFFEN DIVISION”. The same day it claimed that “in the past months the AWD have received hundreds of emails with positive feedback and key cells across the globe have been established within such a short time”, posting a video of heavily armed activists from its recently formed Ukrainian branch.

AWD in turn has influenced The Base, another key name on the Terrorgram circuit. Formed in July 2018 and taking its name from al-Qaeda, the “Siegepilled” (*SIEGE*-promoting) group held paramilitary training camps in the USA during 2019. The group has had a disastrous start to 2020, with six members arrested in the USA for various charges including conspiracy to murder an anti-fascist couple, and *The Guardian* revealing Rinaldo Nazario, an American living in Russia, to be the mastermind behind its operations. However, the brand persists, and continues to resound on Terrorgram.

Also notable in this milieu is the now-defunct Feuerkrieg Division (FKD). Established in late 2018, FKD is believed to have fewer than 50 members primarily based in Europe, including the UK, the Netherlands and Estonia, and has recruited activists in Canada and the USA. In August last year, an alleged FKD activist was arrested in Las Vegas, Nevada for allegedly plotting antisemitic and homophobic attacks, with bomb-making materials found in his home. Following the September arrest of a teenage alleged-member, the group also received press coverage in the UK after it posted a picture of the Chief Constable of West Midlands Police with a gun to his head on Telegram. Another post bore the words “Release our member or your heads will be our agenda”, alongside the addresses of police stations and offices.

Smaller groups include the eco-fascist outfit The Green Brigade (GB), which launched on Telegram in November 2019, quickly accrued over 1,000 followers, and officially disbanded





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in March. Describing itself as “an organization consisting of openly accelerationist, militant environmentalist members focused on tearing down the system that exploits our people, land and animals”, activists distributed posters in Arkansas and New Hampshire in the USA, Stockholm in Sweden, and London and Scotland, UK. VICE magazine linked GB to the group that carried out an arson attack on a mink farm in Sölvesborg, Sweden, and labelled it “a cell within The Base”, although GB claimed it has “no formal agreements with any other group and it will remain that way”.

The Vorherrschaft Division (VSD), established in August 2019, is yet another pro-SIEGE group. Whilst it is undoubtedly tiny, in October last year a synagogue in Michigan was plastered with VSD posters featuring images of Hitler with the words “Did you forget about me?” VSD has also been linked to a man killed in a March shootout with the FBI, suspected of attempting to blow up a hospital in Kansas City. All this makes clear that The British Hand is merely one of numerous extreme right, pro-terrorist groups active simultaneously on Telegram right now.

The purpose of establishing these myriad outfits is decentralisation, ensuring that when a group becomes compromised (such as The Base), others are untarnished. The effect is also disorientating, inflating their scope and creating the illusion that there are nazi cells in every town poised for violence. Whilst their Telegram channels may have hundreds of followers, in reality some of the smaller announced “groups” may at this stage consist of little more than a logo, a Telegram channel and an email address, and their “cells” being single activists.

However, to minimise the threat of far-right terrorism is both foolhardy and dangerous. As we have seen in Christchurch, Poway, El Paso and Halle, it only takes an individual to carry out a deadly attack. In September last year, the head of British counter-terror police claimed that the far right is the fastest-growing terrorist threat in the UK. In the same report, it was announced that 25% of all terrorism arrests in the past year were linked to far-right violence, and a third of all terroristic murder plots since 2017 were motivated by far right causes.

Telegram continues to fail to take sufficient action against the cruel subculture operating through its software, and must do much, much more to impede its spread. All tech companies have a responsibility to deal with the use of their platforms for nefarious purposes, and Telegram must be held to account.

It is crucial to recognise that Telegram is just one part of a wider underground ecosystem, and that members of this system are themselves conscious that the time may soon come when they are forced to find a new online home. As one popular channel posted, “This won’t last forever though, none of this stuff we’re doing on Telegram will. Eventually there will be a ban, a leak, an arrest, and we’ll have the option of finding our next Twitter/Discord/Telegram or we can begin to take things into our own hands”.

However, whilst Telegram bans alone will not eradicate the threat, it would take away one key means by which terrorists radicalise, propagandise and network. The platform must take action now, and we must track down potential terrorists wherever they run to next.



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