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# **The White Supremacist Penetration of Western Security Forces: The Wider Implications**

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## **Abstract**

This article argues that recent instances of white supremacist penetration of Western security forces should not be regarded as isolated issues. They are related to the worrying wider phenomenon of the gradual societal and political mainstreaming of white supremacist ideas in Western countries. Drawing on the German and US cases as examples, the article unpacks the argument by first examining the core theories of white supremacy: the “great replacement” and “white genocide.” It then explores how these theories have been weaponized, before proceeding to analyze the structure and modalities of the white supremacist threat. The article then considers the wider ideological ecosystems that sustain white supremacist worldviews in Germany (the New Right) and in the United States (the alt-right), before finally outlining four possible approaches to combat the challenge of white supremacy in Western societies.

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**I**t was reported in November 2021 that of the 650 individuals charged for their involvement in the hundreds-strong white supremacist–influenced mob that stormed the US Capitol on January 6, 2021, in an effort to prevent Congress from certifying Democratic president Joe Biden’s November 2020 election victory over Republican incumbent Donald Trump, almost 1 in 10 served the US military.<sup>1</sup>

With the benefit of hindsight, perhaps this should not have been so surprising. Before the Australian white supremacist terrorist Brenton Tarrant embarked on his livestreamed murder of fifty-one Muslim worshippers in two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, on March 15, 2019, he posted a manifesto online. He claimed that his ideological beliefs were shared “in every place of employment and field” in Western countries but “disproportionately” so “in military services and law enforcement.”<sup>2</sup> He estimated the “number of soldiers in European armed forces that also belong to nationalist groups to number in the hundreds of thousands, with just as many employed in law enforcement positions.” Tarrant may not have been exaggerating. In early July 2020, reports broke of extensive infiltration by neo-Nazis of Germany’s most elite special forces unit, known by its German acronym, the KSK. Certain KSK members reportedly stole sixty-two kilograms of explosives and forty-eight hundred rounds of ammunition from KSK stocks.<sup>3</sup> White supremacist sentiments within the security forces is not just a German problem. In the United Kingdom, there have been similar concerns of white supremacist threat groups such as National Action’s actively, and in some instances successfully, targeting British servicemen for recruitment.<sup>4</sup> Across the Atlantic, violent white supremacist threat groups such as the Atomwaffen Division and others have indoctrinated many US servicemen as well.<sup>5</sup>

Tarrant observed in his tract that “ethno-nationalists and nationalists”—“unsurprisingly”—pursue “employment in areas that serve their nations and community.”<sup>6</sup> In keeping with this observation, white supremacist threat groups—such as the Oath Keepers, another group that took part in the storming of the US Capitol in early January—seek active or former servicemen with the military skills to fill their ranks as well.<sup>7</sup> But this is not the full picture. The disturbing phenomenon of white supremacist penetration of Western security forces appears to be a function of the gradual societal and political mainstreaming of such ideas in wider communities in Western countries. This article, drawing on the German and US cases as examples, unpacks the argument in five sections, examining first the core theories of white supremacy: the “great replacement” and “white genocide.” The second section looks at how these theories have been weaponized, and the third section analyzes the structure and modalities of the white supremacist threat. The fourth section considers the wider ideological ecosystems that sustain white supremacist worldviews in Germany (the New Right) and in the United States (the alt-right), and the final section reiterates that white supremacist penetration of Western security forces is symptomatic of a wider problem—and what approaches to deal with the issue are possible.

## **The Great Replacement and White Genocide**

As I explain elsewhere, the white supremacist movement, a complex, continually evolving, if fragmented, phenomenon, is “a bewildering amalgam of White nationalists, some White Christian evangelicals, racists, anti-government militias, misogynists, anti-globalisers, and anti-vaxxers, amongst others,” seeking to exploit the “global social and political upheaval”—including the current pandemic—to “promote intolerant ideas and at times inflict violence.”<sup>8</sup> While the ideologies that underpin the movement have gestated for decades, one of the two core theories that now drive the movement came to the fore in recent times; it was popularized in 2012 by the French philosopher Reynaud Camus, who called it *le grand remplacement* (the great replacement).<sup>9</sup> The essential argument holds that white Christian nations are being

overrun by masses of black and brown Muslim immigrants from North and sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>10</sup> The great replacement theory works in tandem with the notion of an existential threat to core group identity, in this instance, white Christian identity. According to this discourse, a “white genocide” is under way, perpetrated by nonwhite European out-groups, such as Jews, Hispanics, and Muslims. White genocide is allegedly the result of the stronger, insular identities and greater relative fertility rates of such out-groups, coupled with lax national integration and immigration policies. Thus, the “great replacement” and “genocide” of the white Christian races needs thwarting urgently.<sup>11</sup>

In Europe, particularly since the refugee crisis of 2015, during which more than a million asylum seekers fleeing conflict landed on the shores of the European Union, some intellectuals, social media, political personalities, and social movements have sought to popularize and mainstream the great replacement theory within European societies. For instance, the conservative British journalist Douglas Murray has voiced deep concern about how Muslim immigration is gradually eroding a tired European civilization. His influential, erudite book *The Strange Death of Europe* has gained significant popularity among anti-immigration politicians in the United States and Europe, including the Hungarian leader Victor Orbán. Murray laments that the “mass movement of peoples in Europe” has resulted in “streets in the cold and rainy northern towns of Europe filled with people dressed for the foothills of Pakistan or the sandstorms of Arabia.”<sup>12</sup> Citing white Christian Europe’s “existential civilisational tiredness,” Murray warns that “while the movement of millions of people from other cultures into a strong culture might have worked,” the mass movement of “millions of people into a guilty, jaded and dying culture cannot.”<sup>13</sup> White Christian Europe, he warns, “one of the most cultured civilisations in history,” is thus about to be “swept away by people”—he pointedly notes, “who are unworthy of them.”<sup>14</sup> To be sure, Murray, Camus, and other prominent conservative European intellectuals promoting the great replacement theory should never be hastily pigeonholed as extremists. Their ideas have been mainstreamed in European circles to such an extent that one observer notes, “If you go to a horse race betting bar and talk politics” and “mention the ‘great replacement,’ people will understand what you mean.”<sup>15</sup>

## **Weaponization of the Great Replacement and White Genocide**

The great replacement and white genocide theories have been weaponized as a rallying cry for white supremacist shooters around the world, including Tarrant, whose manifesto is tellingly entitled “The Great Replacement.”<sup>16</sup> Just over a month after the Christchurch attack, on April 27, 2019, a copycat attack took place in Poway, California. There, John T. Earnest opened fire at a synagogue, killing one woman. Earnest told the police over the phone that he was “defending our nation against the Jewish people, who are trying to destroy all white people,” before calmly awaiting the arrival of police officers to take him into custody.<sup>17</sup> Earnest also published an online manifesto detailing his thoughts around the time of the attack.<sup>18</sup> Investigations revealed that Earnest expressed approval of Tarrant’s attacks and his writings, declaring Tarrant to be “spot on with everything.”<sup>19</sup> Earnest also revealed that Robert Bowers, who killed eleven people at a Pittsburgh synagogue in October 2018, was one of his inspirations. Bowers had previously posted anti-Semitic content online, including his opinion—clearly revealing “White Genocide” influences—that he could not “sit by and watch my people get slaughtered.”<sup>20</sup> Even as he was arrested, he continued to shout that he wanted all Jews to die. This attack is believed to be the deadliest attack on Jews in the United States.<sup>21</sup>

Then on August 3, 2019, Patrick Crusius entered a Walmart in El Paso, armed with a high-powered rifle, and shot dead twenty-two people.<sup>22</sup> He told investigators after being arrested that he wanted to kill as many Mexicans as possible. Like Earnest, Crusius published a manifesto online shortly before he began his attack, claiming to have been inspired by

Tarrant.<sup>23</sup> Just one week later, on August 10, the Norwegian Philip Manshaus shot up a mosque in Baerum. He too posted his thoughts online, calling himself “chosen” by “Saint Tarrant” and praising Tarrant, Crusius, and Earnest for their attacks.<sup>24</sup> Two months later, on October 9, 2019, Stephan Balliet, a German, tried to enter a synagogue in the town of Halle to conduct a livestreamed mass shooting with homemade firearms. When he failed to enter the synagogue, he attacked random passers-by, causing two deaths. Though Balliet did not directly reference any of the preceding white supremacist attackers before him, his *modus operandi*—posting a manifesto and livestreaming the attack—suggests that it was indeed a copycat attack inspired by the same white genocide theory. Balliet’s manifesto, in which he blamed the Jews for all of society’s problems, did indicate that he sought to kill as many nonwhites as possible—but with “Jews preferred.”<sup>25</sup>

The literature on the extent of the threat posed by white supremacist groups largely concurs that the threat is growing steadily. The Soufan Center is unequivocal in asserting that it is the biggest terrorist threat today, claiming that the threat from white supremacist terrorism to Americans “may have surpassed that of Islamist terrorism” and is “far harder to defeat than jihadism” in the longer term.<sup>26</sup> In support of this argument, the Soufan Center points to the statistic that 73 percent of deadly violent extremist incidents in the United States between 2001 and 2016 were perpetrated by far-right extremists, with radical Islamists responsible for only 23 percent.<sup>27</sup> In Europe, between 2016 and 2017, Daniel Koehler reports, the number of white supremacist attacks increased by 43 percent.<sup>28</sup> The Australian Security Intelligence Organisation’s 2018–2019 annual report notes the increased sophistication and organizational skills of white supremacist threat groups in Australia and the growing threat they pose.<sup>29</sup> A 2019 study by the Institute for Economics and Peace asserts that taking Western Europe, North America, Australia, and New Zealand as a whole, white supremacist attacks made up 17.2 percent of all terrorist incidents, compared with only 6.8 percent perpetrated by Islamist jihadist terror networks.<sup>30</sup> According to more recent estimates, 67 percent of all domestic terrorist attacks and plots in the United States between January 1 and August 31, 2020, were carried out by white supremacist or right-wing extremists.<sup>31</sup> In the United Kingdom, in 2020, according to an analysis by the director-general of the British MI-5, “of the twenty-seven late-stage terrorist attack plots in Great Britain disrupted by MI5 and CT [Counter-Terrorism] Policing since 2017, eight have been right-wing extremist.”<sup>32</sup>

## **Structure and Modalities of the White Supremacist Threat**

The threat from white supremacist terrorism is not just growing, it has become more global. White supremacist groups maintain international links with one other, especially those from the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Sweden, and Germany. The Soufan Center notes that Ukraine has emerged as a significant transnational hub for white supremacist fighters. Foreign fighters from fifty-five different countries have traveled to Ukraine to participate in the civil war there between the pro-Ukrainian government forces and Russian-backed separatists—joining both sides. A historical parallel can be drawn between what is happening in Ukraine and foreign jihadists traveling to Afghanistan in the 1980s and more recently to Iraq and Syria to fight. At least forty-two of the countries from which the white supremacist fighters come are generally regarded as having predominantly white/Caucasian populations, and the ten countries that have the most number of fighters who have traveled to Ukraine are all in Europe.<sup>33</sup>

Structurally, white supremacist threat groups have a number of weaknesses that hinder them from conducting potent terrorist attacks when compared to their jihadist counterparts. Despite the transnational linkages discussed earlier, the white supremacist movement as a whole is decentralized and factionalized. As the Soufan Center observes, while the

international jihadist movement has produced global terrorist networks, such as Al Qaeda and the Islamic State, there has been no white supremacist threat organization of such global stature.<sup>34</sup> Europol's 2018 report similarly asserts that the "[right-wing extremist] scene is fragmented and manifests itself in a variety of forms."<sup>35</sup> Jacob Aasland Ravndal argues that though there have been white supremacist attacks in Western Europe, "the threat from *organized* right-wing terrorism to West European citizens is likely significantly lower today than some 20 to 30 years ago."<sup>36</sup> Thus, white supremacist attacks—as seen in the examples of Tarrant, Earnest, Crusius, and others—will likely be conducted by individuals in the form of lone attacks that avoid the risks involved with multiple attackers.<sup>37</sup> Klein, Gruenewald, and Smith similarly found that "successful far-right incidents are more likely to be carried out by lone actors,"<sup>38</sup> while Europol's 2018 report highlighted the rise of "hive terrorism" in Europe, involving individuals not previously connected with organized white supremacist threat groups engaging in lone-actor plots.<sup>39</sup> The key is not the organizing structure but the wider *strategic narrative*.<sup>40</sup> As Helen Taylor notes, "white supremacists need not belong to any of these groups but can instead be inspired by their ideologies."<sup>41</sup> This brings us to the issue of the wider ideological ecosystems that propagate white supremacist theories.

## **Wider Ecosystem of White Supremacism**

### **The New Right in Germany**

Following the work of the terrorism scholar Julia Ebner, we can argue that the white supremacist ideological ecosystem can be broadly conceived of as comprising interlocking "extreme right" and "far right" social, institutional, and political networks. According to Ebner, while the extreme right can usefully be thought of as comprising groups and individuals that espouse "at least three of the following five features: nationalism, racism, xenophobia, anti-democracy and strong state advocacy," the far right can be regarded as referring to the "political manifestation of the extreme right."<sup>42</sup> In Germany, the great replacement and white genocide theories find expression well beyond the previously mentioned and smaller KSK circles, circulating within the wider intellectual ranks of the so-called New Right. This is a broad, well-networked extreme right movement with transnational links comprising not the neo-Nazi skinheads of the "Old Right" but well-educated, social media-savvy businessmen, publishers, and young civil society activists of civil society groups such as Generation Identity, as well as the older, equally well-heeled politicians of the far-right Alternative for Germany, or AfD. An outgrowth of the youth wing of the older French nationalist movement Bloc Identitaire, Generation Identity emerged in 2012 and quickly spread to Austria, Italy, and other European countries, including Germany. Followers of Generation Identity, which is strongly shaped by the great replacement theory, hew to the line that "white genocide" is occurring because of a toxic combination of "pro-abortion and pro-LGBT laws that have lowered the birthrates of native Europeans" and "pro-migration welcoming policies" that permit minorities to engage in "strategic mass breeding."<sup>43</sup> Followers of Generation Identity tend to be "middle class and well spoken," attired in "Ray-Bans and T-shirts rather than jackboots and swastika tattoos."<sup>44</sup>

For its part, the far-right AfD, founded in 2012, propagates narratives that are said to be "tinged with Nazi overtones."<sup>45</sup> The AfD raised its national profile by challenging German chancellor Angela Merkel's decision to allow the arrival of approximately 1.3 million undocumented migrants from the Middle East arising from the Arab Spring troubles in 2015.<sup>46</sup> The party has been campaigning against multiculturalism and integration, emphasizing how Christian society and values need to be protected by the state, and has criticized the policy of "over-proportionally taking in asylum seekers in comparison to other European countries."<sup>47</sup> In an effort to impose a "dominant German culture"—reflecting great replacement and white genocide concerns—the AfD has tried to eliminate any kind of cultural programming that

includes “refugees, or that features practitioners from, or references to, Muslim heritage.”<sup>48</sup> In this respect, the AfD joined protests that clamoured for the removal of a public artwork by the Syrian German artist Manaf Halbouni, alleging that it was a “monument to the Sharia state”—and went so far as to suggest culturally appropriate background music for a tram line in the city of Dresden.<sup>49</sup>

In sum, the New Right has rebranded white supremacist extremism in Germany, giving it “a friendly face.”<sup>50</sup> The New Right message, however, is far less friendly. Typical slogans include “Islamization? Not with us” and “Defend yourself! This is your country.”<sup>51</sup> Tellingly, former German military personnel have stood for election with the AfD, while a former KSK commander has become an eminent ideologue for the New Right. Germany’s KSK problem is thus not strictly a problem of the security forces. Rather it is symptomatic of increasingly mainstreamed white supremacist notions of German culture under threat from supposedly avaricious Muslim immigrants.<sup>52</sup> It is not a uniquely German problem either. The European far-right political parties, in sum, present themselves as the “defenders of European values, culture, and civilization.”<sup>53</sup> Slogans such as “Europe for Europeans,” calls for a “pure Europe,” and references to a “white bastion of civilization” are becoming increasingly prevalent.<sup>54</sup>

### **The Alt-Right in the United States**

The US equivalent of the New Right in Europe could be said to be the alt-right, a “euphemism for modern white supremacism” and a loose, interlocking network comprising extreme right “counter-jihadists and nativists to neo-Nazis who reject or reassess traditional right-wing values.”<sup>55</sup> The intellectual genealogy of alt-right white supremacism has a long and complex history. One of the “intellectual forebears” of the alt-right is said to be the German philosopher Oswald Spengler (1880–1936).<sup>56</sup> Spengler’s most significant work, *The Decline of the West: Perspectives of World-History*, was published in German as two volumes in 1918 and 1923. Both volumes were translated into English and published a few years later.<sup>57</sup> Spengler’s key idea is his utter rejection of the inevitable “Idea of Progress” of Western civilization. He emphasizes instead the impending and inevitable doom of Western civilization because history shows that “civilizational decline is an immutable rule that applies to all civilizations, including the West.”<sup>58</sup> This pessimistic line of thought has reinforced the fear driving white supremacist movements in Germany, the United States, and other Western countries that if nothing drastic is done, the West may well be, as Spengler argues, “somewhere in the latter stages” of decline.<sup>59</sup>

A second more recent and significant intellectual-ideological influence on white supremacism in the United States is the dystopian novel *The Turner Diaries* by William Luther Pierce. It was first published in the 1970s as a fictional account of a white supremacist revolution that culminates in global genocide. *The Diaries* tells the story of an America where nonwhite minorities have disarmed and oppressed white Americans, sparking an armed white nationalist revolt. The story follows a “white supremacist guerrilla resistance movement known as the Order as it launches a series of terrorist attacks, eventually blossoming into a full-blown insurgency,” ending with the Order victorious and embarking on a “campaign of global genocides against non-whites.”<sup>60</sup> Targeting the average reader, *The Diaries* does not dwell much on the doctrinaire justifications for revolution. It focuses instead on how and in what ways such a revolution could be executed.<sup>61</sup> Thus, the novel is often perceived as a blueprint for a white supremacist revolution in real life.<sup>62</sup> It gained prominence when a real-life white supremacist threat group appropriated the name the Order and followed the “tactical blueprint” for revolution elaborated in the novel. Starting in 1983, the Order was responsible for killing three nonwhites and stealing millions of dollars, which they distributed to white supremacist leaders. Significantly, the real-life members of the Order referred to *The Turner Diaries* as

their “bible.” The novel gained international attention when it was discovered that it was pivotal in inspiring Timothy McVeigh’s Oklahoma City bombing in April 1995, which “killed 168 people using a truck bomb strikingly similar to one described in detail in the book.”<sup>63</sup>

The white supremacist, alt-right ideological ecosystem in the post-September 11 era has been dominated by the great replacement and white genocide theories, in which Islam and Muslims have largely been tagged as the key existential threat to “western culture.”<sup>64</sup> In the United States, Jihad Watch is a well-known website created by Robert Spencer. The website aims to expose “the role Islamic Jihad theology and ideology play in modern global conflicts.”<sup>65</sup> Spencer’s basic contention is that there can be no such thing as “moderate Islam.” “Traditional Islam itself,” he argues, “is not moderate or peaceful,” and it is “the only major world religion with a developed doctrine and tradition of warfare against unbelievers.”<sup>66</sup> Jihad Watch is funded by the David Horowitz Freedom Center. Both Jihad Watch and the Freedom Center have been identified as anti-Muslim hate groups by the Southern Poverty Law Center.<sup>67</sup> Significantly, Anders Breivik, the Norwegian white supremacist shooter who killed seventy-seven people in Oslo and Utoya in July 2011,<sup>68</sup> cites Spencer’s work sixty-four times in his manifesto, showing how supposedly nonviolent but targeted rhetoric can have an influence on violent white supremacist terrorists.<sup>69</sup>

Another key alt-right ideologue is Pamela Geller. She and Spencer founded the American Freedom Defense Initiative and Stop Islamization of America. Both organizations have been identified as anti-Muslim hate groups by the Southern Poverty Law Center.<sup>70</sup> Geller has gained popularity through her blog *Atlas Shrugs* and, especially, her frequent media appearances on the Fox News network, where she is presented as an expert on Islam and has been observed to “highlight far-right, fringe, and extremist opinions.”<sup>71</sup> Though Geller insists she opposes radical Islam, she has been quoted as describing Islam itself as a “genocidal ideology” and a “religion of violence,” disseminating such views not only on Fox News but also on CNN and Russia Today.<sup>72</sup> Like those of Spencer, Geller’s views were cited by the 2011 Oslo shooter Breivik in his manifesto. It has been suggested that “it would be unfair to attribute Mr. Breivik’s violence to the writers who helped shape his world view.” However, since the likes of Spencer and Geller argue that “the fundamentalist Salafi branch of Islam ‘is the infrastructure from which Al Qaeda emerged,’ they and their writings” are also “the infrastructure from which Breivik emerged.”<sup>73</sup>

Most recently, white supremacist ideological ideas have been further mainstreamed in the United States through web-based news outlets such as AltRight.com. AltRight.com was started by Richard Spencer—no relation to Robert Spencer—who popularized the term “alt right” or “alternative right” to describe a “politics that combined racist white nationalism, isolationism and criticism of mainstream conservatism.”<sup>74</sup> Richard Spencer has argued that as long as “whites continue to avoid and deny their own racial identity, at a time when almost every other racial and ethnic category is rediscovering and asserting its own, whites will have no chance to resist their dispossession.”<sup>75</sup> Much like the trendy New Right in Germany, Spencer pointedly adopts a “suit-and-tie image” to “look good” as “nobody wants to join a movement that is ‘crazed or ugly or vicious or just stupid.’”<sup>76</sup> While Richard Spencer has thus gained mainstream media coverage in outlets such as CNN by “largely avoiding crude slurs” in public and by the adroit “cultivation of a superficial civility,” he nevertheless has been “caught on tape using racist slurs against African Americans and Jewish people.”<sup>77</sup> Notably, Richard Spencer has also been a key supporter of former president Donald Trump, arguing in 2016 that thanks to Trump, the alt-right would replace the traditional conservative Republican base, who, Spencer felt, were made up of people who were “losers and dorks and dumb.”<sup>78</sup> Spencer argued that the alt-right—who, he claimed, were “smarter” than the old conservatives—would serve as the “think tank” to enable Trump to build a white-nationalist “ethno-state” in the United States.<sup>79</sup> Certainly Spencer’s faith in Trump was not misplaced. During his announcement that he would

run for office in 2016, Trump had infamously declared that “Mexico is not our friend” and continued to disparage Mexican immigrants by saying: “They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists.”<sup>80</sup>

In November 2015, after the Islamic State terrorist attack in Paris, Trump told MSNBC he would “strongly consider closing certain American mosques” if he were president.<sup>81</sup> Further, in March 2016 during a CNN interview, he made little distinction between Islam and radical Islam, declaring, “I think Islam hates us.”<sup>82</sup> Trump’s strident posture on Islam is not surprising. One of his closest advisers was the alt-right platform Breitbart News’ founder and board member Steve Bannon. Breitbart regularly hosted Pamela Geller, with Bannon observing that Geller’s Islamophobic views had influenced Trump.<sup>83</sup> As one analyst put it, Trump won the 2016 presidential election because of the increased, mainstreamed political appeal and power of “white supremacy” in the United States; he was in truth the “white-supremacist-in-chief.”<sup>84</sup> One potent expression of Trump’s discernible white-supremacist orientation was his use of inflammatory language about nonwhites—for instance, repeatedly calling Mexican migrant men “rapists”<sup>85</sup>—which some analysts insist was a deliberate attempt to “dehumanize and demonize the migrants.”<sup>86</sup> In doing so, Trump framed migration as an evil, existential threat to white Christian American cultural identity and “a call for moral action towards the evil and to the centrist politicians that created this evil in the first place.”<sup>87</sup> After Crusius had targeted Mexicans in El Paso in August 2019 following the release of a manifesto in which he echoes Trump’s anti-immigrant rhetoric, Trump asserted that the shooting was the product of “mental illness and hatred.”<sup>88</sup> Disagreeing, former congressman from El Paso Beto O’Rourke charged that through his ongoing rhetoric, Trump was “inciting racism and violence in this country.”<sup>89</sup>

It should be noted that the alt-right and New Right ideological ecosystems in the United States and Germany, respectively, are by no means sealed off from each other. Thanks to “social media,” “like-minded groups” have engaged in extensive communication and cooperation across borders, generating a “powerful multiplier effect.”<sup>90</sup> In 2016, a study by the UK antiracist organization Hope Not Hate counted twenty-four such white supremacist, counter-jihad movements in the United Kingdom, forty-two in the United States, and twelve in Australia.<sup>91</sup> For instance, Robert Spencer and Pamela Geller have close contacts with the British counter-jihadist Tommy Robinson, founder of the English Defence League (EDL).<sup>92</sup> EDL in turn has contacts with and has influenced the German extreme-right PEGIDA movement, while the white supremacist website Gates of Vienna—which Anders Breivik read—also publicizes the platforms of both the EDL and PEGIDA.<sup>93</sup> Furthermore, Tommy Robinson has linked up with French white supremacists—also known as Identitarians—such as Yann Valerie, while the Austrian Identitarian Martin Sellner has had good coverage by the US-based Breitbart News.<sup>94</sup> As Ebner argues, such “international alliances” between white supremacist “extremists give them an edge over moderates” and “help them to stretch their echo chambers and expand their influence across the globe”<sup>95</sup>—as well as, it is worth noting, within Western law enforcement and military circles. Thus, while the German defense minister in July 2020 felt compelled to disband an entire KSK fighting company that was seen as “infested with extremists,”<sup>96</sup> seven months later, the new US defense secretary, Lloyd Austin, “announced plans for military-wide stand-downs” to “rid the military of ‘racists and extremists.’”<sup>97</sup>

## **Combating White Supremacy: Four Approaches**

Purging white supremacists from within the ranks of the German and US security forces is just the first step. As this article has argued, there is also the need to systematically map out the key nodes of the wider interlocking ideological ecosystems of white supremacy within the United States, Germany, and, for that matter, other Western countries. For years, white supremacist,

extreme-right intellectuals, social media personalities and their associated platforms, and influential far-right political parties and politicians have attracted significant levels of national attention and executed sophisticated social media campaigns to spread their messages domestically and internationally. Taken together, these efforts at shaping public discourse have generated a more “favourable and normalised public environment” in which white supremacist ideas and themes have, as seen, become increasingly mainstream.<sup>98</sup> Rather than “anti-social outsiders,”<sup>99</sup> many followers of the New Right in Germany and the alt-right in the United States are “perfectly normal people, socially integrated, connected in one way or another to mainstream groups and ideas.”<sup>100</sup> But they do seem to share a certain generalized anxiety that white European civilization is in inexorable decline, in the face of a massive cultural invasion by tighter-knit, aggressive out-groups such as Muslims and other immigrants.<sup>101</sup> Thus, the first part of any comprehensive effort to combat white supremacist extremism—in the United States, Germany, and other Western countries—must be to foster good political and socioeconomic governance, no easy task given the current COVID-19 pandemic. To be sure, “the effects of the pandemic are not solely health-related,” because the “economic downturn” and the “social impact of the pandemic” provide “some of the material conditions in which the far right may thrive, enlarging the pool of potential recruits and blurring the lines between the far right and the mainstream.”<sup>102</sup>

Good governance, however, is just part of the solution. Such efforts must be accompanied by a concerted effort within Muslim communities in the United States, Germany, and other Western countries to better contextualize their faith within the multicultural milieus of the West to improve integration, thereby neutralizing the key white supremacist theories of the great replacement and white genocide. In this respect, former president Trump claimed in 2016 that “there’s no real assimilation” by even “second- and third- generation Muslim Americans.”<sup>103</sup> Interestingly, this might well have been one of the times that Trump was not far off the mark. A 2019 study found that “both immigrants and US-born Muslim Americans demonstrate a strong adherence to their Islamic identity and low levels of conformity to American social norms,” with “American-born Muslims” scoring “significantly lower on conformity to American social norms than immigrant Muslims.”<sup>104</sup> The report on the study concludes that the findings are “consistent with previous research suggesting that Muslim Americans are less likely to sacrifice religious values to assimilate” and notes that they appear to face challenges “integrating in an increasingly hostile host culture.”<sup>105</sup> At the same time, observers describe a similar challenge of Muslim migrant integration into German society. Ahmad Khalil, a Syrian writer based in Germany, writes that a “large segment of the Muslim refugees or expatriates” describe the “society that embraced them as immoral and disintegrated,” adding that at times it seems that “some expatriates” desire “the host country to take on the culture of its guests and recognize the supremacy of their values”—a supremacist stance reinforced by “dogmatic religious authorities and preachers.”<sup>106</sup> The Christchurch shooter Tarrant’s assertion in his manifesto justifying his attacks on Muslims that they are “high in group preference and a will to conquer”<sup>107</sup> suggests that more assertive though moderate Muslim leadership is needed. Such leadership should promote a more “reconciled Muslim identity” able to mesh well with the realities of secular, liberal democratic and multicultural Western societies like those in the United States and Germany, as part of the overall policy mix to counter white supremacist extremism.<sup>108</sup>

A third approach to combating white supremacy would be to develop a more widespread sensitivity to the subtle white supremacist ideas embedded in the rhetoric of the most erudite personalities and tracts. Developing this sensitivity involves strengthening biblical literacy among the evangelical Christians who are drawn to white supremacist rhetoric. Elizabeth Neumann, a former top homeland security official and a devout Christian, argued recently that “if we had a more scripturally based set of believers in this country,” they “would not have

been so easily deceived” by the so-called QAnon conspiracy,<sup>109</sup> which was part of the ideological mix of the mob that assaulted the US Capitol on January 6, 2021.<sup>110</sup> Adequate theological literacy should go hand in hand, though, with a habit of critical thinking: Neumann added that too many US Christians are “not necessarily reading scripture for themselves,” or “if they are, they’re reading it through the lens of one pastor, and they’re not necessarily open to hearing outside perspectives on what the text might say.”<sup>111</sup> The previously discussed ideological ecosystems, especially social media platforms, act as online echo chambers for such relatively parochial white evangelical Christian communities, who often “see their worldview reflected and encouraged,” even if “in complete opposition to the facts.”<sup>112</sup> In a similar vein, media observers have noted how the “co-dependency” between Trump and the alt-right Fox News created a huge echo chamber that drew in millions of viewers nightly.<sup>113</sup> Furthermore, it has been established that the relatively unregulated social media platforms Parler and Gab acted as “echo chambers for violence and extremist views, then provided a platform for some of the coordination” of the January 6 attack.<sup>114</sup>

Fourth and perhaps most fundamentally, it may be time for the construction of national identities in Germany, the United States, and perhaps also other Western nations that transcend narrow culturalist understandings and strengthen shared creedal values instead. As Francis Fukuyama argues, a creedal nation is based not on any particular ethnicity, race, or religion but rather on the common political principles of constitutionalism, the rule of law, democratic accountability, and equality.<sup>115</sup> Fukuyama asserts, for instance, that the Protestant work ethic should no longer be seen as the sole preserve of “Anglo-Protestant culture”—as what some conservative public intellectuals and for that matter more avowedly white supremacist ideologues might say. Rather, such an ethic has “become detached from its particular ethno-religious origins” and is today “the common property of all Americans.”<sup>116</sup> Similarly, Amy Chua calls for an ideological re-emphasis on the overarching American “super-group”—rather than on more parochial identities related to “whiteness,” “Anglo-Protestant culture,” or “European Christianity”—“or any other terms not inclusive of all religions and ethnicities.”<sup>117</sup> In short, given the realities of a globalized, deeply interconnected world, it may well be time for secular, liberal democratic, and white-majority but multicultural countries to more strongly emphasize inclusive creedal core identities. Otherwise, white supremacist ideologies will continue to find fallow soil to germinate. These ideas will continue infecting all sectors of society—including the strategically sensitive sector of the military services and law enforcement. Rather than exaggerating, Brenton Tarrant may well have blundered onto a truth that modern Western societies need to face squarely.

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## **Notes**

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