

**Written Testimony of  
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**Before the  
Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
Committee on Homeland Security  
Intelligence and Counterterrorism Subcommittee**

**Regarding  
“Assessing the Threat from Accelerationists and Far-Right Militia Extremists”  
July 16, 2020**

Chairman Rose, Ranking Member Walker, and esteemed members of the subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to testify. My name is Heidi Beirich. I hold a Ph.D. in political science from Purdue University and am the co-founder of the Global Project Against Hate and Extremism (GPAHE). For the two decades prior to founding my current organization this year, I served as the director of the Southern Poverty Law Center’s Intelligence Project, where I monitored, issued reports about, and trained law enforcement officials on far-right extremist activity in the United States. An important area of that work involved providing information about the threats these movements pose to law enforcement and intelligence officials in terms of both domestic and global terrorism.

I am an expert on white supremacist and other extremist movements in the United States and abroad, serving as an advisory board member of the International Network for Hate Studies, a co-founder and co-chair of the Change the Terms Coalition, which advances policy solutions to online extremism, and the author of numerous studies on extremism as well as co-editor of *Neo-Confederacy: A Critical Introduction*. My research has been cited in hundreds of academic pieces and news articles, including on the topic of accelerationist movements, and how they intertwine with other forms of extremism. I am honored to appear before you today.

**Far Right Terrorism is on the Rise**

The subject of this hearing is critical. All evidence, by government agencies in the US and abroad, and by other experts, points to far-right extremism as a metastasizing problem that this country and many others will be dealing with for the long term. In June, the bipartisan Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) analyzed a data set of terrorist attacks in the United States occurring between January 1994 and May 2020.<sup>1</sup> CSIS concluded that “far-right terrorism has significantly outpaced terrorism from other types of perpetrators, including from far-left

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.csis.org/analysis/escalating-terrorism-problem-united-states>

networks and individuals inspired by the Islamic State and al-Qaeda. Right-wing extremists perpetrated two-thirds of the attacks and plots in 2019 and over 90 percent between January 1 and May 8, 2020.”<sup>2</sup> Looking to the future, CSIS advises “terrorism in the United States will likely increase over the next year” in particular because of the November presidential election.

American law enforcement and intelligence agencies agree with CSIS. In August 2019, the National Counter Terrorism Center (NCTC) quietly added white supremacist violence to its mandate.<sup>3</sup> In September 2019, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) declared white supremacy as big a threat as ISIS or al-Qaeda.<sup>4</sup> DHS warned that “white supremacist violent extremists have adopted an increasingly transnational outlook” driven by connecting with “like-minded individuals online.”<sup>5</sup> DHS specified the sharing of the “ethnic replacement” idea, which motivated the Tree of Life synagogue, the El Paso Walmart, and the Christchurch, N.Z., shooters among others, as particularly problematic. It is the favorite propaganda of accelerationist terrorist movements.

In February 2020, the FBI announced that it now considered the risk of violence from these groups as “on the same footing” as threats posed to the country by foreign terrorist organizations such as ISIS.<sup>6</sup> In June 2020, the U.S. State Department announced that white supremacist terrorism is “a serious challenge for the global community.”<sup>7</sup> In April, the State Department designated the Russian Imperial Movement (which offered training to American organizers of the Charlottesville, Va., riots) and members of its leadership as “Specially Designated Global Terrorists.”<sup>8</sup> This is the first time in history that the State Department labeled a white supremacist terrorist group in this manner.

Accelerationism has many variants and can be traced back to thinkers including Karl Marx, but when it comes to white supremacists and other far-right extremists, their accelerationist variant sees “modern society as irredeemable and believe it should be pushed to collapse so a fascist society built on ethnonationalism can take its place.”<sup>9</sup> They specifically believe that violence is the only way to change politics, and they want to “accelerate” that change through violent actions to destabilize political systems with the goal of establishing white supremacist states. The fact that “accelerationism” is spreading through white supremacist circles and other extremist movements such as the Boogaloo Bois, makes the topic of this hearing all the

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.csis.org/analysis/escalating-terrorism-problem-united-states>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.realcleardefense.com/2019/08/09/nctc\\_now\\_going\\_after\\_domestic\\_terror\\_309384.html](https://www.realcleardefense.com/2019/08/09/nctc_now_going_after_domestic_terror_309384.html)

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/domestic-terror--particularly-white-supremacist-violence--as-big-a-threat-as-isis-al-qaeda-dhs-says/2019/09/20/dff8aa4e-dbad-11e9-bfb1-849887369476\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/domestic-terror--particularly-white-supremacist-violence--as-big-a-threat-as-isis-al-qaeda-dhs-says/2019/09/20/dff8aa4e-dbad-11e9-bfb1-849887369476_story.html)

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/19\\_0920\\_plcy\\_strategic-framework-counteracting-terrorism-targeted-violence.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/19_0920_plcy_strategic-framework-counteracting-terrorism-targeted-violence.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/racially-motivated-violent-extremism-isis-national-threat-priority-fbi-director-christopher-wray/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2019/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.state.gov/united-states-designates-russian-imperial-movement-and-leaders-as-global-terrorists/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2020/06/23/there-no-political-solution-accelerationism-white-power-movement>

more important. As Cassie Miller of the SPLC has noted, “Accelerationists aren’t part of a new movement. They’re just an iteration more inclined toward terroristic violence.”<sup>10</sup>

The current pandemic and protests for racial justice have propelled this movement’s growth. In recent months, accelerationists have spread disinformation and conspiracy theories tying the pandemic to Jews and immigrants, whom they allege are responsible for COVID-19. In May, the FBI’s New York office warned that neo-Nazis and other racist extremists were encouraging their supporters who had contracted Covid-19 to infect cops and Jews.<sup>11</sup> In early June, the UK’s Commission for Countering Extremism warned that neo-Nazis and far-right activists were telling their followers to “deliberately infect” Jews and Muslims.<sup>12</sup> As Soufan Center’s Senior Fellow Colin P. Clarke recently argued, “Accelerationists believe that the social upheaval they promote, which is viewed as a necessary prelude that will usher in the rebuilding of society on the basis of white power, has been made plausible by the scenes of illness and death dominating mainstream news coverage.”<sup>13</sup>

### **The Age of Accelerationism**

Given the spread of accelerationism, we are now facing increasing terrorist threats inspired and motivated by a complex set of ideas. White supremacists are taking up weapons in an attempt to create conditions that will stop the process of demographic change in the Western world. Accelerationists, some of whom are also concerned by changing demographics, are investigating, and some preparing, terrorist violence for a coming race war. Heavily armed militias were active in the anti-lockdown movement and attended the protests for racial justice after George Floyd was killed by Minneapolis police in May. They supposedly went to protect property, but there were reports of violent incidents including shootings.<sup>14</sup> We face an incendiary mix of white supremacists, militia members, and new formations like the Boogaloo Bois, increasingly interested in bringing about the collapse of society through violence.

The true accelerant of these movements is the Internet. It was nearly impossible for extremists in earlier eras to connect and recruit when their only tools were faxes and phones, and no one was monetizing or advertising their content. Much as Hitler used the new radio to push his views into German families’ homes, thereby radicalizing an entire country into genocidal thinking, extremists who saw the potential of the Internet in the 1990s have been able to successfully use mainstream online platforms in the same way. Given that the major platforms did not begin to enforce their anti-hate terms of service until after the Charlottesville, Va., riots

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<sup>10</sup><https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2020/06/23/there-no-political-solution-accelerationism-white-power-movement>

<sup>11</sup><https://abcnews.go.com/US/white-supremacists-encouraging-members-spread-coronavirus-cops-jews/story?id=69737522>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2020/07/09/uk/extremism-deliberately-covid-19-intl-scli-gbr/index.html>

<sup>13</sup><https://www.fpri.org/article/2020/04/the-growing-threat-posed-by-accelerationism-and-accelerationist-groups-worldwide/>

<sup>14</sup><https://www.modbee.com/opinion/editorials/article243381126.html>;  
<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-protests-omak-ohio-militia-groups-george-floyd-blm-a9573576.html>

in 2017, and still are muddling their responses to these issues today, there is no way to know how many millions were and still are radicalized online. But make no mistake, the dynamics that created today's growing accelerationist terrorist problem originate in cyberspace.

### *Mass Attacks and The Great Replacement*

In the last two years, we have seen mass terrorist attacks driven by white supremacy in the US and around the world. They have been inspired in particular by the ideas of the Great Replacement, which argues that white people are being genocided in their home countries and replaced by non-white immigrants. This is now the leading propaganda point for white supremacists worldwide.

This concept is the bedrock idea propagated by the Identitarian movement, in particular Generation Identity (GI), a sprawling, multinational organization with chapters in at least 14 countries and allies in others, including the United States.<sup>15</sup> For example, Richard Spencer allied with Identitarian thinking years ago. The reach of Identitarian thinking is wide, with attendant think tanks, institutes, housing complexes, newspapers, clothing labels, and individual supporters. As fears of the Great Replacement have spread across the Western world, so too has violence by lone actors motivated to stop the supposedly impending white genocide. Since October 2018, there have been at least six mass attacks motivated by Great Replacement ideas. Besides Christchurch, attacks were staged at two American synagogues, an El Paso Walmart, a synagogue in Halle, Germany, and two shisha bars in Hanau, Germany, where the shooter is believed to have been targeting Muslim immigrants.

The white supremacist killers in these attacks did not pick up their ideas of white genocide and the Great Replacement randomly. The Identitarian movement uses its massive online presence to spread its abhorrent anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant messaging, and to warn of a coming civil war while assiduously recruiting young people into its ranks and ideology. Identitarians' real-world publicity stunts targeting Muslims and immigrants provide fuel for its online audience in the form of viral images, videos, music, and press coverage, all of which help draw more young people into its ranks.

It is particularly disturbing that a movement whose ideas are linked directly to terrorism and the building of an international white supremacist network conducts its online organizing in plain sight, on YouTube and others, and until mid-July on Twitter, when the accounts were taken down after GPAHE released a report on the dangers of this movement. These mainstream accounts are then used to drive traffic to darker corners of the internet, where messaging is even more explicit and offers no pretense of acceptance of Muslims, refugees, and immigrants.

### *Violent Neo-Nazi Formations*

Accelerationism gained attention with the rise of two neo-Nazi organizations, Atomwaffen Division (AWD), German for atomic weapons, and The Base, whose name is the

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<sup>15</sup><https://www.globalextrémism.org/post/international-white-nationalist-movement-spreading-on-twitter-and-youtube>

English translation for al-Qaeda. Founded in 2015, AWD initially organized on the neo-fascist Iron March forum. A violent neo-Nazi network that celebrates Hitler and Charles Manson, AWD has been key to promoting the accelerationist ideas. AWD videos portray young men, wearing camouflage and scarves over their faces, firing rifles during military-style training. One video begins with group members shouting in unison, “Race War Now.”

AWD members were responsible for multiple murders by 2017. These included a gay student in California, a couple in Virginia, and the murder of a member’s two roommates in a Tampa apartment.<sup>16</sup> Besides the U.S. murders, AWD members planned terrorist attacks, created a hit list, and sent death threats to German politicians it targeted for assassination. AWD was international, with chapters in England, Canada, Germany and the Baltic states.<sup>17</sup>

As has been the case for many of these new movements, arrests of AWD members revealed many had a military background or were in active service. In 2018, Marine Lance Corporal Vasillios G. Pistolis, was expelled from the Marine Corps for his ties to AWD and for participating in violent assaults during the Charlottesville riots in 2017. Pistolis later bragged about his involvement online with other members of AWD.

Pistolis’ expulsion was widely reported, but the details of the arrest of the leader of the group, Brandon Russell, are much less well-known, and paint a troubling picture of how the military handles white supremacists in its ranks. In 2017, Russell, who was serving in the Florida Army National Guard, was arrested after one of his roommates, Devon Arthurs, killed two of his other roommates in a Tampa apartment.<sup>18</sup> Investigators on the scene discovered a cache of weapons, detonators, volatile chemical compounds, including a cooler full of HMTD, a powerful explosive often used by bomb makers, and ammonium nitrate, the substance used by Timothy McVeigh in the Oklahoma City attack, and two radioactive isotopes, americium and thorium.

While Arthurs was arrested for homicide, police released Russell, who claimed that he used the explosives to power model rockets. Within hours, Russell acquired an AR-15-style assault rifle and a bolt-action hunting rifle. He loaded homemade body armor and more than 1,000 rounds of ammunition into his car and headed to the Florida Keys with another AWD member. Sheriff’s deputies in Monroe County ultimately arrested him.

In 2018, The Base, largely patterned off of AWD, was founded. That December, Rinaldo Nazzaro, the group’s leader who is now presumed to be living in Russia,<sup>19</sup> purchased 30 acres of remote land in Republic, Wash. His intent was to create a training compound for his recruits to prepare for a coming race war. The Base believe that, in the coming chaos, the federal government will grant them the power to construct an all-white homeland in the Northwest (long a dream of white supremacists often referred to as the Northwest Territorial Imperative). The

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<sup>16</sup><https://www.npr.org/2018/03/06/590292705/5-killings-3-states-and-1-common-neo-nazi-link>

<sup>17</sup>[https://1897edad-2ee4-4b59-a583-57ac06e2e6c7.usfiles.com/ugd/1897ed\\_280aa90146b040a1ba4416820519084f.pdf](https://1897edad-2ee4-4b59-a583-57ac06e2e6c7.usfiles.com/ugd/1897ed_280aa90146b040a1ba4416820519084f.pdf)

<sup>18</sup><https://www.propublica.org/article/an-atomwaffen-member-sketched-a-map-to-take-the-neo-nazis-down-what-path-officials-took-is-a-mystery>

<sup>19</sup><https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jan/23/revealed-the-true-identity-of-the-leader-of-americas-neo-nazi-terror-group>

Base planned to accelerate a full system collapse through acts of terrorism. In January 2020, the FBI arrested three men from the group. Importantly, one of the men arrested was in possession of a ghost gun, a weapon self-built from parts not purchased from a manufacturer.<sup>20</sup>

As with AWD, two of the men had previous military training: Brian Mark Lemley was an Army cavalry scout, and Patrik Jordan Mathews had been a combat engineer in the Canadian Army Reserve, indicating that the reach of these groups is a problem for foreign military services as well our own. According to court documents, these men discussed “recruitment, creating a white ethno-state, committing acts of violence against minority communities (including African-Americans and Jewish-Americans), the organization’s military-style training camps, and ways to make improvised explosive devices.”<sup>21</sup> Other members of the group were arrested for a plot to murder an anti-racist activist couple in north Georgia, and another was charged with vandalizing a synagogue in Racine, Wisc.<sup>22</sup>

### *Boogaloo Bois*

With the global pandemic and the May racial justice protests, a new wave of attacks has targeted protestors and law enforcement. Many are connected to the Boogaloo Bois, a loosely organized American far-right extremist movement. The movement first gained public attention when heavily armed members in their signature Hawaiian shirts and leis were seen at anti-lockdown protests in April.<sup>23</sup> This movement is preparing for, or seeks to incite, a second American civil war, likely sparked by a government confiscation of firearms. The movement is complex and includes pro-gun groups, militias, and racists, all with varying views on race.

The term boogaloo emerged from the unregulated 4chan board in 2012, but did not come to widespread attention until late 2019.<sup>24</sup> The term itself is a reference to “Breakin’ 2: Electric Boogaloo,” a 1984 movie about breakdancing that extremists, from gun rights to militia movements to white supremacists, began using to refer to an impending civil war, the coming “boogaloo.”<sup>25</sup> The word is intentionally ridiculous, used ironically to spread online memes, many of which include violent text and images.

On May 30, three men who identified as boogaloo adherents were arrested on terrorism charges in Las Vegas.<sup>26</sup> They had been plotting since April to bomb an electrical substation but

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<sup>20</sup><https://everytown.org/press/ghost-guns-a-weapon-of-choice-for-white-supremacists-arrested-ahead-of-virginia-rally/>

<sup>21</sup><https://apps.npr.org/documents/document.html?id=6658688-The-Base-Lemley-Mathews-Bilbrough-Arrests>

<sup>22</sup><https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/crime/2020/01/17/alleged-member-neo-nazi-group-charged-racine-synagogue-vandalism/4505324002/>

<sup>23</sup>[https://www.vice.com/en\\_us/article/y3zmj5/the-boogaloo-bois-are-bringing-their-ar-15s-and-civil-war-ideology-to-the-lockdown-protests](https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/y3zmj5/the-boogaloo-bois-are-bringing-their-ar-15s-and-civil-war-ideology-to-the-lockdown-protests)

<sup>24</sup><https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/social-media/what-boogaloo-how-online-calls-violent-uprising-are-getting-organized-n1138461>

<sup>25</sup><https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/social-media/what-boogaloo-how-online-calls-violent-uprising-are-getting-organized-n1138461>

<sup>26</sup><https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-news/boogaloo-boys-george-floyd-protests-black-lives-matter-1010117/>

then shifted their focus to the racial justice protests. Air Force sergeant Steven Carrillo and Robert Justus were charged with the June 6, 2020 murder of a Santa Cruz County deputy and the May 29, 2020 murder of a Federal Protective Service officer in Oakland, Calif. Carrillo wrote “Boog” and the phrases “I became unreasonable,” a boogaloo meme, in his own blood on the hood of a vehicle. The van allegedly used in the murders contained a patch with a boogaloo symbol and a ballistic vest bearing the boogaloo symbol of an American flag with an igloo instead of stars.<sup>27</sup> Carrillo was using an AR-15 ghost gun.<sup>28</sup> Carrillo was an active-duty member of an elite Air Force unit tasked with guarding American military personnel at unsecure foreign airfields.<sup>29</sup> His security clearance required the monitoring of all of his social media per a 2016 directive. Clearly the rule was not being enforced.<sup>30</sup>

According to authorities, the two men used recent demonstrations against racial injustice as a cover to attack law enforcement. The FBI agent in charge of the investigation said that the alleged perpetrators did not appear to intend to join the protests but “came to Oakland to kill cops.”<sup>31</sup> The Internet connected these men. Carrillo and Justus met on Facebook, and just two days later, they perpetrated their first attack.<sup>32</sup>

### **The Internet Drives Terrorism**

At this point, it is well accepted that white supremacy is as significant a threat for generating mass casualty terrorist acts domestically and internationally as other forms of extremism. Though good data does not exist on what inspires hate crimes perpetrators, it would be inconceivable that online hate propaganda didn’t play a role. The answer to slowing its spread and reducing its influence lies largely in containing the proliferation of these ideas online. For law enforcement, knowledge of the online ecosystem and the often bizarre language and memes, is key to infiltrating accelerationist networks as they work to stop future attacks.

All of the movements thrive online. That is where recruitment occurs, money is raised, and plans hatched. They have sophisticated strategies to draw in recruits, and they make their posts as appealing as possible through inside jokes, memes, slick videos, and references that only those on the inside understand. The groups are intentional about this work. In a manual produced by Generation Identity, which pushes the Great Replacement narrative, called “The Art of Red-Pilling,” step-by-step instructions for radicalizing potential recruits are provided. “You sow the soft red pill seeds and then you water them constantly. An honest question to start with, a news

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<sup>27</sup> <https://www.mercurynews.com/2020/06/16/santa-cruz-deputys-alleged-killer-charged-with-assassinating-federal-cop-in-oakland-ambush/>

<sup>28</sup> <https://sanfrancisco.cbslocal.com/2020/06/16/steven-carrillo-david-underwood-murder-santa-cruz-deputy-fatal-shooting-fatal-oakland-federal-building-shooting/>

<sup>29</sup> <https://apnews.com/9186215f571341b8e344a17402fa73e9>

<sup>30</sup> [https://www.dni.gov/files/NCSC/documents/Regulations/SEAD\\_5.pdf](https://www.dni.gov/files/NCSC/documents/Regulations/SEAD_5.pdf)

<sup>31</sup> <https://apnews.com/9186215f571341b8e344a17402fa73e9>

<sup>32</sup> <https://sanfrancisco.cbslocal.com/2020/06/17/steven-carrillo-david-underwood-boogaloo-facebook-posts-santa-cruz-shooting-damon-gutzwiler/>

piece here, an email there, and in the evening, an anecdote over beer,” reads the manual.<sup>33</sup> It recommends taking advantage first of grievances over free speech, political correctness, or gender equality, slowly drawing in young recruits before radicalizing them with racist ideas and driving them to darker, unregulated parts of the internet such as Telegram.

A July study by Type Investigations of recent domestic terrorist events found “that incidents involving people who were exposed to violent extremist ideologies almost entirely online – rather than through contact in real-world settings – rose substantially starting in 2015, amounting to nearly one in five incidents [since then]... nearly every case we catalogued in recent years involved some degree of online radicalization.”<sup>34</sup> This conclusion applied to all forms of extremism - right-wing, left-wing and Islamist.

Yet, there is a double standard when it comes to how online platforms treat content produced by white supremacists compared to content by Islamic extremist groups like ISIS or al-Qaeda. For the latter, deplatforming is the accepted, and actually, demanded strategy, one pushed by the American government, the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT), and the major technology platforms.

Not so for white supremacist groups. Enforcement of restrictions and bans on these groups and their acolytes is much more haphazard, despite their proliferation of propaganda such as accelerationism or the Great Replacement, which similarly inspires terrorism. Until a deplatforming that came in the wake of GPAHE’s report on Generation Identity released in early July, the group had dozens of chapter Twitter accounts. As of today, it continues to have monetized videos running on YouTube. Some of the ads are for political campaigns (not at the behest of the campaigns).

It would be inconceivable for social media platforms to allow ISIS propaganda to spread and grow unchecked, or to be monetized. Beginning around 2015, Twitter implemented a mass suspension of ISIS and similar accounts.<sup>35</sup> In 2016, major tech companies launched a shared database of “hashes,” or digital “fingerprints,” of extremist imagery so as to be able to identify and curb the spread of terrorist content online.<sup>36</sup> This work would ultimately become the joint tech company effort, GIFCT, which now has dozens of companies using its work to identify Islamic extremist material.

By 2018, Twitter had removed some one million Islamic extremist accounts.<sup>37</sup> YouTube took similar actions, and in 2017 began redirecting users searching for this material to Islamic clerics denouncing the group.<sup>38</sup> And it worked. A study by J. M. Berger and Jonathan Morgan, “The ISIS Twitter Census,” found that the deplatforming of ISIS accounts was successful. “The

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<sup>33</sup><https://www.politico.eu/article/who-are-europe-far-right-identitarians-austria-generation-identity-martin-sellner/>

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.typeinvestigations.org/investigation/2020/07/09/domestic-terror-in-the-age-of-trump/>

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/06/technology/twitter-account-suspensions-terrorism.html>

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/social-medias-stepped-up-crackdown-on-terrorists-still-falls-short/>

<sup>37</sup> <https://fortune.com/2018/04/05/twitter-terrorist-account-suspensions/>

<sup>38</sup> <https://techcrunch.com/2017/07/20/google-jigsaw-redirect-method-launch-youtube-isis/>

data we collected also suggests that the current rate of suspensions has also limited the ISIS network's ability to grow and spread, a consideration almost universally ignored by critics of suspension tactics. The consequences of neglecting to weed a garden are obvious, even though weeds will always return."<sup>39</sup> Graphic online images of beheadings and other violence were also greatly reduced, the study found.

This mass purge did not encounter a political backlash or calls that the takedowns violated free speech principles. The American government supported the deplatforming. Significantly, the same kind of success, particularly in terms of reducing the number of recruits into other kinds of movements such as white supremacy, comes with their deplatforming.<sup>40</sup> In September 2019, it was announced that GIFCT would become a standalone nonprofit institution that will counter all forms of extremist content regardless of its ideological underpinnings. It remains to be seen if GIFCT will take on white supremacy.

And as to the other mainstream platforms, the question now is, with the US and other foreign government agencies arguing that white supremacist and boogaloo propaganda is inspiring terrorist violence, and with the rise of worldwide white supremacy as a terror-inducing ideology, will these social media platforms treat this and similar material as they have ISIS propaganda? Or will white supremacist groups continue to get a pass for inspiring terrorism online even though their propaganda does so in the same way ISIS propaganda does?

## **Recommendations for Combating New and Emerging Threats**

### *Online Hate*

There needs to be a shift in the mentality of most mainstream platforms about the dangers related to white supremacy and accelerationist movements. As someone who has worked for nearly a decade to convince the major technology companies of their role in fomenting white supremacy and its violence, I know how absolutely reluctant these companies are to address these issues. It wasn't until the Charlottesville riots that change came to Silicon Valley. Though better than a couple of years ago, enforcement is still erratic and piecemeal. Too often it takes anti-hate and civil rights activists to find problematic material and push for its removal. It is indefensible that these nonprofits and activists are spending precious resources running down online hate for multi-billion dollar corporations.

As a coalition member and co-founder of Change the Terms (CTT), I would advocate that all Internet companies study and adopt CTT's model policies.<sup>41</sup> Enforcement of companies' terms of service and other actions are uneven, and they are often recalcitrant, so major education on the part of anti-racist groups and civil society are required. For example, Facebook did deplatform Boogaloo Bois content, but only after violence perpetrated by its acolytes and major

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<sup>39</sup> [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/isis\\_twitter\\_census\\_berger\\_morgan.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/isis_twitter_census_berger_morgan.pdf)

<sup>40</sup> <https://twitter.com/MeganSquire0/status/1281621941296738307>

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.changethetterms.org>

education efforts by civil society.<sup>42</sup> And they deplatformed Generation Identity content, but only after the Christchurch killer live-streamed his murders on their system. They have also removed hundreds of white supremacist groups from their platform, but many can still use event-planning pages and other aspects of the platform to either finance or push their noxious ideas.

Facebook's recent civil rights audit concluded, "Facebook's approach to civil rights remains too reactive and piecemeal."<sup>43</sup> It found the platform to be rife with anti-Muslim sentiment. And this after the Christchurch attacks, and after Facebook was used by the Myanmar government to ethnically cleanse the Rohingya population.<sup>44</sup> These events would suggest that Facebook would take anti-Muslim activity very seriously, but there is still too much work to be done on anti-Muslim and other bigotry. The audit also found that the company's algorithms continue to push people toward self-reinforcing echo chambers that deepen polarization and further radicalization.

Many of the audit findings could easily apply to other tech companies. Despite claiming in 2019 to disallow white supremacists, it took until late June 2020 for YouTube to ban major hate figures such as David Duke. A report by GPAHE showed in mid-June that presidential campaign ads were running on white supremacist videos as well as other types of advertising, in effect monetizing white supremacy. YouTube's response was that this was just a "glitch"<sup>45</sup> that had been fixed, but the ads continue to run this week.

In other cases, certain platforms have done quite a lot to rid their systems of these accounts. For example, PayPal in 2017 began to deplatform white supremacist materials, but accounts do continue to slip through their systems. GPAHE warned them of two major accounts just last week and they took action against one.

This is a complex issue and the solutions will vary based on the type of platform under consideration. The legislation proposed by Chairman Rose, the Raising the Bar Act, could help establish a baseline of where each platform is in terms of dealing with this content and then hold the platforms accountable for doing better.<sup>46</sup> GPAHE is a partner to the International Coalition Against Cyber Hate (INACH), which works with the European Commission (EC) to monitor hate online and whose members conduct the monitoring exercises that the EC uses to determine how well each company is doing. This data has been invaluable in Europe for holding the major platforms accountable and has led to improved efforts to combat hate online. Not surprisingly, the technology companies seem to improve the enforcement of their terms of service after each round of monitoring. Chairman Rose's proposed legislation would do the same here in the United States.

In mid-June, the Global Project Against Hate and Extremism put forth a set of recommendations for white supremacist content on mainstream platforms. It includes that:

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<sup>42</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-53244339>

<sup>43</sup> <https://about.fb.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Civil-Rights-Audit-Final-Report.pdf>

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/06/technology/myanmar-facebook.html>

<sup>45</sup> <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/07/07/youtube-trump-biden-campaign-ads-russia-white-supremacist-350650>

<sup>46</sup> <https://maxrose.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=2403>

dangerous and terrorist-connected propaganda and groups must be deplatformed; policies against hate speech and posting by violent extremist groups need to be clearly defined to include white supremacist propaganda and groups; these policies must be rigorously enforced; deplatforming organized white supremacist groups must be prioritized, and white supremacy must be recognized as a driver of terrorism at the same level as Islamic extremism by GIFCT and the major technology companies; algorithms and search systems should never recommend white supremacist content; both AI systems and content reviewers must be trained to prioritize white supremacist material for removal; identifying white supremacist and other hate content should not be outsourced to civil society and anti-racist activists; and there should be no monetization of white supremacist material through ads, and payment processors should not allow their products to be used by extremists.

### *Military extremism*

There is no stemming the tide of these movements without getting a handle on extremism in the military. A thorough hearing was held on this topic this past February by the House's Armed Services Military Personnel Subcommittee.<sup>47</sup> I testified alongside other experts at the hearing and provided written testimony on the extent of this problem in the United States.<sup>48</sup> There have been dozens of terrorist and attempted terrorist acts committed by serving and former members of the Armed Forces. These have included acts of violence by adherents of the movements discussed here. And of course the largest domestic terrorist attack in the US before 9/11, Timothy McVeigh's bombing of an Oklahoma City federal building, was committed by a veteran who had both white supremacist and militia ties.

Active military personnel are well aware of this problem and polling by the *Military Times* in 2017,<sup>49</sup> 2018,<sup>50</sup> and 2019,<sup>51</sup> indicates that white nationalist views appeared widespread. In the 2019 poll released on February 6, 2020, the publication reported that more than one-third of all active-duty troops and more than half of minority service members say they have personally witnessed examples of "white nationalism or ideologically-driven racism within the ranks."

Congresswoman Jackie Spier has recently advanced legislation as part of the 2021 National Defense Authorization Act that would significantly help with this issue.<sup>52</sup> My testimony last February also included extensive recommendations to address the problem. I would like to

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<sup>47</sup> <https://www.c-span.org/video/?469238-1/white-supremacy-military>

<sup>48</sup> [https://1897edad-2ee4-4b59-a583-57ac06e2e6c7.usrfiles.com/ugd/1897ed\\_280aa90146b040a1ba4416820519084f.pdf](https://1897edad-2ee4-4b59-a583-57ac06e2e6c7.usrfiles.com/ugd/1897ed_280aa90146b040a1ba4416820519084f.pdf)

<sup>49</sup> <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2017/10/23/military-times-poll-one-in-four-troops-sees-white-nationalism-in-the-ranks/>

<sup>50</sup> <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2019/02/28/white-nationalism-remains-a-problem-for-the-military-poll-shows/>

<sup>51</sup> <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2020/02/06/signs-of-white-supremacy-extremism-up-again-in-poll-of-active-duty-troops/>

<sup>52</sup> <https://speier.house.gov/2020/7/ndaa-markup-includes-chair-speier-s-provisions-to-address-military-racial-and-ethnic-disparities-and-promote-inclusion>

highlight one particular problem here. There is currently no ban on members of antigovernment groups serving in the armed forces in the same way that white supremacists are, at least theoretically, banned (though enforcement is lacking and highly uneven). Given that militias have picked up on accelerationist ideas and are mixing with other dangerous movements such as the Boogaloo Bois, legislative intervention is in order.

### *Law Enforcement Priorities*

In just the last year, every federal law enforcement agency is on record saying that white supremacy is the most significant threat the country faces in terms of domestic terrorism. That includes the National Counter Terrorism Center (NCTC), the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the FBI and the State Department. This is a huge advance given that for years, the federal government under both Democratic and Republican administrations, refused to admit that this threat was exploding.<sup>53</sup>

And this growing problem is not just happening in the US. Governments in Germany,<sup>54</sup> the UK,<sup>55</sup> Australia<sup>56</sup> and many other countries have come to the same conclusion. In April, the Counter Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) of the UN Security Council published, “Member States Concerned by the Growing and Increasingly Transnational Threat of Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism.”<sup>57</sup> CTED reported that ten of its states have this concern and “although extreme right-wing terrorism is not a new phenomenon, there has been a recent increase in its frequency and lethality, with some individuals, groups and movements pursuing transnational aims in a national context, drawing on international networks, ideas and personalities, and seeking to mobilize others, often using the Internet. This has led to multiple large-scale terrorist attacks targeting minorities.”

So what are the solutions to this problem in the law enforcement realm? There are some pieces of legislation already proposed that make sense in this realm. Chairman Rose’s Transnational White Supremacist Extremism Review Act, which would direct DHS to develop and disseminate a terrorist threat assessment of foreign violent white supremacist extremist groups, makes sense.<sup>58</sup> A significant problem in tracking these movements is a lack of useful data, which is the direct result of the lack of interest in these issues that has existed for so long in the federal government. Additionally, the bill proposed by House Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Benne Thompson, the Domestic Terrorism Documentation and Analysis of Threats in America Act, and which has been referred to the Senate, also makes sense.<sup>59</sup> The bill

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<sup>53</sup> [https://www.splcenter.org/sites/default/files/cohen.homeland\\_security-final.pdf](https://www.splcenter.org/sites/default/files/cohen.homeland_security-final.pdf)

<sup>54</sup> <https://www.voanews.com/europe/germany-sees-right-wing-extremism-top-security-threat>

<sup>55</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-49088293>

<sup>56</sup> <https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/news/law-crime/2020/03/21/right-wing-terrorism-the-rise-australia/15847092009572>

<sup>57</sup> [https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/CTED\\_Trends\\_Alert\\_Extreme\\_Right-Wing\\_Terrorism.pdf](https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/CTED_Trends_Alert_Extreme_Right-Wing_Terrorism.pdf)

<sup>58</sup> <https://maxrose.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=2480>

<sup>59</sup> <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/3106>

would in part require the FBI, DOJ, and DHS to produce an annual, unclassified joint report about this issue, providing a set of much-needed data.<sup>60</sup>

I do have deep concerns about the process that could be used to designate white supremacist groups as “foreign terrorist organizations” or any proposed legislation that would increase the powers of law enforcement agencies in terms of domestic terrorism. The most important concern is this country’s terrible history when it comes to increasing law enforcement powers that then end up being used against marginalized communities. Faiza Patel of the Brennan Center has said, “Throughout its history, the FBI has used its authorities to investigate and monitor political protesters and civil rights activists. Since 9/11, the FBI has used its counterterrorism authorities to target Muslims, Arabs, and people from the Middle East and Asia, as well as people who dissent from the status quo. In 2005, the FBI named ‘eco-terrorism,’ which hasn’t produced a single fatality in this country, the number one domestic terrorism threat. In August 2017, the FBI concocted a ‘black identity extremist movement’<sup>61</sup> out of a handful of unrelated acts of violence and warned law enforcement agencies across the country that black activists protesting police violence posed a threat to them.”<sup>62</sup>

Additionally, I think it could be argued that federal law enforcement already has substantial legal authorities to pursue the terrorism under discussion today, if they would only apply those powers. A domestic terrorism statute is not necessary. As former FBI agent Mike German has repeatedly pointed out, there are already “57 different federal criminal statutes that the [federal criminal] code calls ‘federal crimes of terrorism.’ Fifty-one of them apply to cases the federal government designates ‘domestic terrorism.’”<sup>63</sup> These already broad authorities make it questionable that more are needed.

The issue appears not to be a lack of legal authorities but rather an unwillingness by law enforcement to use its authorities against right-wing extremism in the same way it does with other forms of extremism. A recent study by Type Investigations of multiple domestic terrorist attacks came to this conclusion about priorities when it comes to interrupting plots: “[L]aw enforcement priorities remain skewed. The database shows that during the first three years, 2017-2019, cases involving Islamist extremists were preempted 18 times, compared with seven completed attacks, or 72% ... In contrast, a minority of right-wing extremist cases were preempted – 18, compared with 30 realized attacks, or 37.5%.”<sup>64</sup> The study further finds law enforcement still doesn’t see white supremacy and antigovernment extremism as the serious threat it is.

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<sup>60</sup><https://homeland.house.gov/news/legislation/chairman-thompson-committee-democrats-introduce-legislation-to-bolster-domestic-terrorism-data-transparency-and-research>

<sup>61</sup><https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/10/06/the-fbi-has-identified-a-new-domestic-terrorist-threat-and-its-black-identity-extremists/>

<sup>62</sup><https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/new-domestic-terrorism-laws-are-unnecessary-fighting-white-nationalists>

<sup>63</sup> <https://www.justsecurity.org/61876/laws-needed-domestic-terrorism/>

<sup>64</sup> <https://www.typeinvestigations.org/investigation/2020/07/09/domestic-terror-in-the-age-of-trump/>

I would recommend extensive study of the potential unintended consequences to marginalized communities and civil and human rights violations before further employing that FTO label for white supremacy and before enhancing the powers of federal law enforcement with a new domestic terrorism statute. We cannot solve the white supremacist terrorism problem by violating citizen's rights.

Finally, sensible gun control measures would help keep guns out of extremists' hands.

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