



Security Nexus Perspectives

TARRANT'S LAST LAUGH? THE SPECTRE OF WHITE SUPREMACIST PENETRATION OF WESTERN SECURITY FORCES

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Before embarking on his livestreamed murder of 51 Muslim worshippers in two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand on 15 March 2019, the Australian white supremacist and terrorist, Brenton Tarrant, posted a manifesto online. He claimed that his ideological beliefs were shared “in every place of employment and field”² in Western countries but “disproportionately” so “in military services and law enforcement.” 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 entirely exaggerating. In early July, 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 pilfered 62 kilograms of explosives and 48000 rounds of ammunition from KSK stocks.](#)³ This prompted the German defence minister to disband an entire KSK fighting company seen as [“infested with extremists.”](#)

White supremacist sentiments within the security forces is not only a German problem. In the UK, there have been similar concerns of white supremacist threat groups such as National Action, that have actively, and in some cases successfully, targeted British servicemen for recruitment.⁴ Meanwhile,

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² Brenton Tarrant, “The Great Replacement”, 15 March 2019.

³ Katrin Bennhold, “As Neo-Nazis Seed Military Ranks, Germany Confronts and ‘Enemy Within’”, *The New York Times*, 3 July 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/03/world/europe/germany-military-neo-nazis-ksk.html?referringSource=articleShare>

⁴ Jacob Davey, “We Must Act Fast to Stop Far Right Groups From Targeting Military Personnel”, *The Guardian*, 6 September 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/sep/06/far-right-military-personnel>

across the Atlantic, violent white supremacist threat groups such as the Atomwaffen Division and others have indoctrinated a number of US servicemen.⁵

Tarrant observed in his tract that “ethno-nationalists and nationalists” – “unsurprisingly” - pursue “employment in areas that serve their nations and community.”⁶ Meanwhile, white supremacist threat groups actively seek active or former servicemen with the military skillsets to fill their ranks. This is not the full picture however. This disturbing phenomenon of white supremacist penetration of Western security forces is a function of the societal and political mainstreaming of such ideas in wider communities in Western countries such as Germany.

The Great Replacement Motif

White supremacist extremism, also known as “right-wing” and “far right” extremism, is a broad label of convenience that lumps together, amongst others, white nationalist, neo-Nazi, anti-immigrant, anti-gun control, anti-LGBTQ and increasingly even misogynistic grievances.⁷ While its key tropes have gestated for decades, an underlying theme that has come to the fore in recent times has been the notion of what the French philosopher Reynaud Camus in 2012 called *Le Grand Remplacement (The Great Replacement)*.⁸ This argument holds that white, Christian Europe has been overrun by masses of black and brown Muslim immigrants from North and sub-Saharan Africa. Since the refugee crisis of 2015, in which more than a million asylum seekers fleeing conflict landed on the shores of the European Union, white supremacist-friendly intellectuals, social media, political personalities and movements have sought to mainstream the Great Replacement motif within European societies.

For instance, the conservative British journalist Douglas Murray voiced deep concern about how Muslim immigration is gradually eroding a tired European civilisation. His influential, erudite book, *The Strange Death of Europe*, has gained popularity amongst anti-immigration politicians in the US and Europe, such as, the Hungarian leader Victor Orban. 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.”⁹ 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.”¹⁰ White Christian Europe, he warns, “one of the most cultured civilisations in history,” is thus about to be “swept away by people who are unworthy of them.”¹¹

⁵ A.C. Thompson, Ali Winston and Jake Hanrahan, “Ranks of Notorious Hate Group Include Active-Duty Military”, *Propublica*, 3 May 2018, <https://www.propublica.org/article/atomwaffen-division-hate-group-active-duty-military>

⁶ Tarrant, “The Great Replacement”.

⁷ Kyler Ong, “Ideological Convergence in the Extreme Right”, *Counter-Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, Vol. 12, Issue 5 (September 2020), pp. 1-7.

⁸ James McAuley, “How Gay Icon Renaud Camus Became the Ideologue of White Supremacy”, *The Nation*, 17 June 2019, <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/renaud-camus-great-replacement-brenton-tarrant/>

⁹ Murtaza Hussein, “The Far Right is Obsessed with a Book about Muslims Destroying Europe. Here’s What it Gets Wrong”, *The Intercept*, 25 December 2018, <https://theintercept.com/2018/12/25/strange-death-of-europe-douglas-murray-review/>

¹⁰ “On the Edge?”, *Weekly Word*, 18 November 2019, <http://weeklyword.eu/en/on-the-edge/>

¹¹ Douglas Murray, *The Strange Death of Europe: Immigration, Identity, Islam* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), p. 3.

To be sure, Murray, Camus and other prominent conservative European intellectuals promoting this Great Replacement motif should not be hastily pigeonholed as extremists. That said, their ideas have been mainstreamed in European circles to such an extent that some observers note that “if you go to a horse race betting bar and talk politics” and “mention the ‘great replacement’, people will understand what you mean.”¹² Worse, the Great Replacement motif has been weaponised as a rallying cry for white supremacist shooters around the world, including Tarrant, whose own manifesto is tellingly entitled - *The Great Replacement*.

The Wider Ecosystem of White Supremacism

Certainly in Germany itself, the Great Replacement theme finds expression within the intellectual ranks of the so-called New Right. This is a broad, well-networked movement with transnational links comprising – not the neo-Nazi skinheads of the “Old Right” – but rather well-educated, social media-savvy businessmen, publishers and young civil society activists of groups like Generation Identity, as well as the older, equally well-heeled politicians of the right-wing Alternative for Germany, or AfD. As one observer put it, the New Right has rebranded white supremacist extremism in Germany, giving it “a friendly face.”¹³

The New Right message is less friendly though. Typical slogans include “Islamization? Not with Us” and “Defend Yourself! This is Your Country.” 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 symptomatic of increasingly mainstreamed white supremacist notions of German culture under threat from supposedly avaricious Muslim immigrants.

Implications

What then is to be done? Systematically mapping out the links between white supremacists within the military and with counterparts in the wider ecosystem is just the first step. Muslim immigrant communities must be encouraged to better contextualize their faith within the German, multicultural milieu to aid better integration – thereby neutralizing a key white supremacist trope. Developing literacy in ferreting out subtle white supremacist ideas issuing from the most erudite of personalities and tracts is surely required as well.

Most fundamentally, it may be time for constructions of German national identity to transcend narrow culturalist understandings and strengthen shared creedal values instead. As Francis Fukuyama cogently argues, a multicultural, democratic but creedal nation is based not on any particular ethnicity, race, religion but rather the common political principles of constitutionalism, the rule of law, democratic accountability, and equality.¹⁴

What is happening in Germany affects other globalized, multicultural, democratic Western nations as well. Unless they develop creedal core identities, white supremacist ideologies will continue to find fallow soil to germinate.

¹² Norimitsu Onishi, “The Man Behind A Toxic Slogan Promoting White Supremacy”, *The New York Times*, 20 September 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/20/world/europe/renaud-camus-great-replacement.html>.

¹³ Katrin Bennhold, “Germany’s Far Right Rebrands: Friednlier Face, Same Doctrine”, *The New York Times*, 27 December 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/27/world/europe/germany-far-right-generation-identity.html>

¹⁴ Francis Fukuyama, *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018), pp. 158-161.

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These ideas will infect all sectors of society, including the strategically sensitive sector of the military services and law enforcement. Rather than exaggerating, the likes of Brenton Tarrant may well have had the last laugh.

Ex-Security professionals find themselves in increasingly more complex decision-making environments in which trust is more difficult to establish and maintain, and in which people demand higher quality and performance. Having the type of guidance provided by thought leaders is essential for them to get ahead of challenges, to achieve a competitive advantage, and to be more relevant to the real-world.

*The views expressed in this article are the author's alone, and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the DKI APCSS or the United States Government.
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