



Program on Extremism

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

# TRANSNATIONAL NEO-NAZISM IN THE USA, UNITED KINGDOM AND AUSTRALIA

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## About the Program on Extremism

The Program on Extremism at George Washington University provides analysis on issues related to violent and non-violent extremism. The Program spearheads innovative and thoughtful academic inquiry, producing empirical work that strengthens extremism research as a distinct field of study. The Program aims to develop pragmatic policy solutions that resonate with policymakers, civic leaders, and the general public.

## About the Author

Dr Paul Jackson is a historian of twentieth century and contemporary history, and his main teaching and research interests focus on understanding the impact of radical and extreme ideologies on wider societies. Dr. Jackson's research currently focuses on the dynamics of neo-Nazi, and other, extreme right ideologies, in Britain and Europe in the post-war period. He is also interested in researching the longer history of radical ideologies and cultures in Britain too, especially those linked in some way to the extreme right.

Dr. Jackson's teaching engages with wider themes related to the history of fascism, genocide, totalitarian politics and revolutionary ideologies. Dr. Jackson teaches modules on the Holocaust, as well as the history of Communism and fascism.

Dr. Jackson regularly writes for the magazine Searchlight on issues related to contemporary extreme right politics. He is a co-editor of the Wiley-Blackwell journal Religion Compass: Modern Ideologies and Faith. Dr. Jackson is also the Editor of the Bloomsbury book series A Modern History of Politics and Violence.

*The views expressed in this paper are solely those of the author, and not necessarily those of the Program on Extremism or the George Washington University.*

## Introduction

Neo-Nazism is often presented as the most taboo and dangerous form of far right activism. News reports featuring neo-Nazis regularly focus on hate crimes, violence, and terrorism, as well as their fascination with cultic. However, these types of reports, sometimes featuring excellent investigative journalism, offer only a partial picture of this often-misunderstood milieu, and can sensationalize as much as inform. This article offers a deep dive into contemporary neo-Nazi culture, and assesses the risks posed by contemporary neo-Nazi groups by exploring the relationship between extreme ideas and extreme actions.

It will show that the neo-Nazi milieu is transnational, fostering a wide range of small groups that operate across borders. These groups collectively develop a shared culture of radical opposition to mainstream society, idealizing a revolution in the name of the Aryan race. In these networks, neo-Nazis exchange a wide range of ideas that make up their worldview, and often take inspiration from each other's activism. It will also highlight that these transnational neo-Nazi cultures, while steeped in radicalized discourses idealizing the violence of the Nazi regime and targeting groups such as Jewish communities today, often develop internal breaks on engaging in physical acts of violence. Typically, groups stop short of acting on their ideology by carrying out extreme violence, as members often see non-violent activism as more effective and less risky. They prefer to promote activity such as direct action stunts, running training camps for activists, and creating online communities.

So, while outwardly aggressive, these activities tend to steer activists linked to groups away from actual acts of violence, though they certainly do not stop them from engaging in criminality inspired by their ideas or disseminating deeply offensive material. On occasion, neo-Nazi groups do attract individuals with a range of wider instabilities who become inspired by the movement's narratives to 'take action' and carry out violent acts, sometimes even lone actor terrorism. While this is atypical activity for most neo-Nazi activists linked to groups, and is only partially explained through the movement's ideas, it clearly suggest this unstable, extreme culture poses an on-going risk to wider public safety.

What follows will explore these themes by focusing on a loose network of neo-Nazi groups that have emerged in Britain, America and Australia. It assesses the British group National Action, which was proscribed under terrorism legislation in December 2016, alongside a range of smaller follow-on groups; Atomwaffen Division, an American group founded in 2015 along similar lines; and Antipodean Resistance, an Australian group founded in 2016 and inspired by these groups. Additionally, this paper will examine how this network has developed through online spaces, especially through the websites [ironmarch.org](http://ironmarch.org) and [fascistforge.com](http://fascistforge.com), which have allowed them to share ideas, inspire each other and project their activities to a wider extremist milieu.

## Overview of a Neo-Nazi Network

A neo-Nazi group can be usefully defined as any political organization that takes overt inspiration from the ideas of Adolf Hitler and the National Socialist movement in Germany and tries to recalibrate these themes for a new era after 1945. Often anti-Semitic conspiracy narratives, and visions of revolution focused on establishing National Socialist ideals, lie at the core of neo-Nazi politics.<sup>1</sup> However, dating the origins of any network of any single neo-Nazi group is difficult, as each discrete organization ultimately emerges from a nebulous tradition of activism. With this broad conceptualization, we see that a complex neo-Nazi movement emerged during the years immediately after the Second World War, and has been developing in a wide variety of ways ever since.

Marginalized and steeped in a radically alternate worldview, neo-Nazi groups can also be seen as akin to cults. The sociologist of religion, Colin Campbell proposed the value of the term the ‘cultic milieu’ for studying cults, and argued that while each individual cult was difficult to define and identify, all seemed to emerge from a wider culture of activity which opposed mainstream society and offered those drawn to it a deeper ‘truth’ and sense of seekership, or search for higher meaning. Neo-Nazi culture is analogous to this phenomenon, and building on Campbell, the term cultic milieu has been used widely in the study of neo-Nazism.<sup>2</sup> Variants of neo-Nazism have inspired myriad individual groups that have a wide range of contrasting formats, from political parties, to the white power music scene, to terrorist underground cells, to direct action youth organizations.<sup>3</sup>

Historically, standout Anglophone groups specifically linking British, American and Australian neo-Nazism began with the World Union of National Socialists (WUNS), a network fostered by the National Socialist Movement in Britain and the American Nazi Party in the 1960s. This global network of marginal neo-Nazi groups allowed a relationship to develop between the WUNS and the National Socialist Party of Australia, which was also active in the 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>4</sup> Though the WUNS network has long since fallen into decline, the Anglophone neo-Nazi milieu it helped to generate has continued to foster transnational activism, a tendency that has been facilitated by the internet in recent times.<sup>5</sup> Producing and maintaining this sub-culture have been countless discrete groups, activists and endeavors, which have never been comprehensively mapped.

### *National Action*

Moving to the present day, the ever-adaptable phenomenon of neo-Nazism seems to be finding new forms in the global extreme right scene, especially configurations attractive to younger people looking for radical forms of activism. The first of the neo-Nazi youth organizations under analysis here to be founded was National Action, which started publishing posts on its website in August

2013. The group emerged from the extreme right British National Party, which was in decline at this time, as well as other small groups, such as the Integralist Party of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.<sup>6</sup> The website's 'Why National Action' page explained its aims as follows:

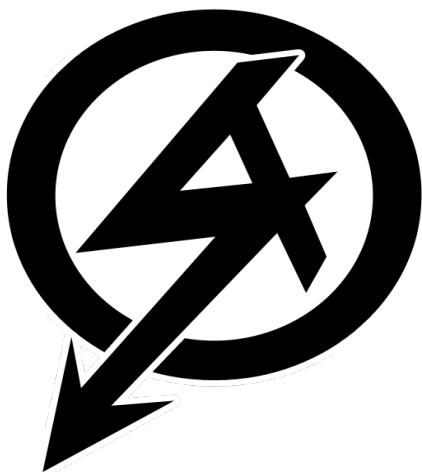
National Action is primarily intended for the youth. The youth are the key to the future. When people begin supporting us (the far right), they need an organization that they actually can support – that's respectable, militant, well-organized, and radical and that doesn't constantly embarrass itself or give it's enemies ammunition to attack it with due to their own stupidity and lack of foresight.<sup>7</sup>

While criticism of other British extreme right groups was clear, it also gave the Greek extreme nationalist party Golden Dawn as an exemplar of the type of movement it wanted to create.

In September 2013, it published a 'Strategy and Promotion' guide that explained one of the key ways of capturing a youthful profile was to develop a dynamic aesthetic, adding:

Part of raising the social status of nationalism is going to be providing a look – a style that is fashionable, but we own and is associated with us ... Right now our name is to somehow become chic – we have a limited audience, but we want them to have something they can wear which doesn't embarrass them, but makes them feel proud to represent.<sup>8</sup>

Steeped in a distinctive graphic style from the outset, National Action's material was also overtly neo-Nazi, regularly articulating a conspiracy theory claiming the existence of a hidden Jewish plot, a mentality drawn directly from Hitler. Symbolizing its overt neo-Nazism, its logo was a modified version of the Nazi *Sturmabteilung*, or SA, logo.



Early activity linked to National Action included an anti-Semitic Twitter campaign against the Labour Party MP, Luciana Berger. This was initiated by 21-year-old activist Garron Helm, who tweeted an image of Berger with a Jewish Star of David, alongside the slogan ‘Hitler Was Right.’ Reminiscent of Nazi-era identification of Jewish people, the incident led to Helm’s conviction and imprisonment.<sup>9</sup> However, the incident also attracted the attention of anti-Semites from across the globe. Helm was celebrated by the wider movement,<sup>10</sup> and Berger reportedly received a further 2,000 abusive Tweets, including numerous death threats. As well as indicating National Action’s overt neo-Nazism, this event helped raise their profile internationally.

Between these early endeavors and their proscription under British terrorism legislation in December 2016, the group attracted around 100 activists, who by October 2016 were spread across the following regional groups: NA Scotland; NA North East; NA Yorkshire; NA North West; NA Midlands; NA South West; NA London; and NA East Anglia. Activities included running outdoor camps, where members were given combat training, ‘White Man’ street marches, provocative stickering campaigns on university campuses and even running a Miss Hitler competition in 2016. A constant, albeit small-scale, presence on the fringe of the British extreme right scene, by the end of 2016 the group’s notoriety grew significantly.

In June 2016, the Labour MP Jo Cox was killed by a lone actor terrorist, Thomas Mair, who like National Action was inspired by neo-Nazis ideals. While Mair had no links to National Action, he was subsequently idealized by the group. Their website included statements such as ‘Only 649 MPs to go,’ and ‘Don’t let this man’s sacrifice go in vain.’ This led to greater concerns about the group’s attitude towards terrorism, and the Home Secretary Amber Rudd proscribed National Action as a terrorist organization, which came into effect on 16 December 2016. Specifically, its statements in support of Mair were among the reasons the group was considered a terrorist threat.<sup>11</sup>

After National Action was proscribed, an unprecedented step in the UK as no such neo-Nazi groups had been treated in this way, academic commentators such as Chris Allen expected follow on groups to develop.<sup>12</sup> While the ban was in general effective in stymieing the group, over the course of 2017, new groups did emerge from the old organization. This included the Scottish Dawn, a small street marching group that was active in the spring and summer of 2017.<sup>13</sup> Its logo, a black life rune on a yellow background, was designed by one of National Action’s founders, Benjamin Raymond. Another group, NS131 was founded by Alex Davies and also linked to Raymond; the letters and numbers stood for National Socialist Anti-Capitalist Action. It developed online material advocating graffiti as a form of activism.<sup>14</sup> In September 2017, authorities responded to the growth of follow-on groups by arresting other activists linked to them, including some who were members of the British Army. In the wake of these revelations, Scottish Dawn and NS131 were also proscribed.<sup>15</sup>

By 2018, National Action activists were being convicted of terrorism related offences. This

included, among others, Alex Deakin, found guilty of possessing material useful for committing terrorism and distributing extremist publications.<sup>16</sup> Most disturbingly, another National Action activist, Jack Renshaw, was convicted of plotting a terrorist attack on the Labour MP Rosie Cooper, a case discussed in more detail below. While proscription and conviction of key members largely stymied National Action, further efforts to continue the energies of the group continued. Davies set up another group, System Resistance Network, which again was steeped in a similar visual style to National Action. Its website stated the group was dedicated to the destruction of a system that ‘imports non-Whites en masse to rape our children and colonise our country while criminalising any pushback from the public.’<sup>17</sup>

In December 2018, the BBC reported that yet another related neo-Nazi group, Sonnenkreig Division, was active. Its members had called for the rape and murder of police officers, as well as stating that Prince Harry should be shot as he was a ‘race traitor’. Led by a chemistry student, Andrew Dymock, who had previously been linked to System Resistance Network, the BBC’s reporting highlighted that online chat forums used by the group included people active in the similar US group, Atomwaffen Division.<sup>18</sup> Then in June 2019, two teenagers linked to the tiny group, Polish national and student, Michal Szewczuk, and Oskar Dunn-Koczorowski, a laborer, were convicted of encouraging terrorism.<sup>19</sup> Highlighting the continuity between these groups, both had been active in System Resistance Network and Dunn-Koczorowski had also been active in National Action.<sup>20</sup>

### *Atomwaffen Division*

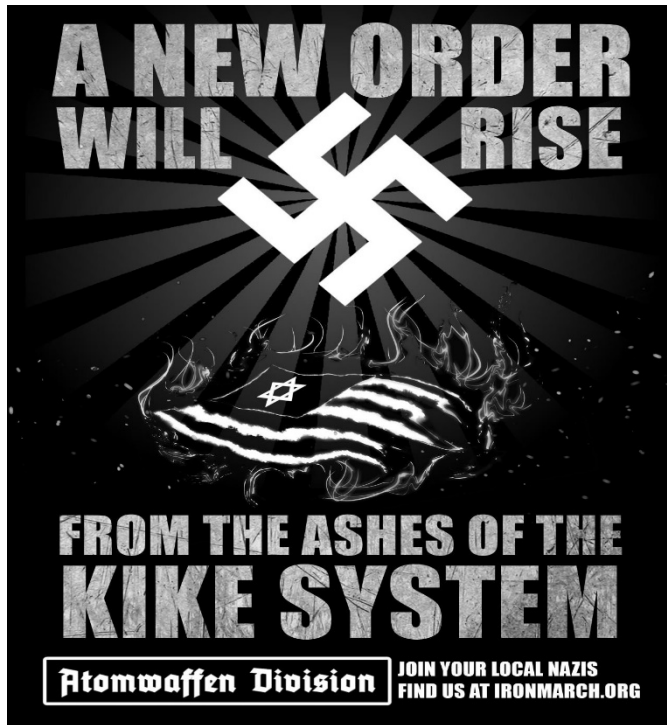
National Action members networked with likeminded activists internationally from the outset. They did this in various ways, including initially via the forum ironmarch.org. National Action co-founder, Benjamin Raymond, was an administrator on this site, and here was able to develop links with sympathetic American activists. These links came to include the American group Atomwaffen Division, the name derived from the German for atomic warfare.

The website for Atomwaffen Division, atomwaffendivision.org, currently offline, explained the aims of the group as follows:

Formed in 2013 ‘The Atomwaffen Division’ is a Revolutionary National Socialist organization centered around political activism and the practice of an autonomous Fascist lifestyle. As an ideological band of comrades, we perform both activism and militant training ... Joining us means serious dedication not only to the Atomwaffen Division and its members, but to the goal of ultimate uncompromising victory.<sup>21</sup>

A post from ironmarch.org, from 12 October 2015, explained the group had around 40 members, based in Florida as well as ‘Chicago, Texas, and New England, Boston, New York, Kentucky, Alabama, Ohio, Missouri, Oregon Virginia, and a few others.’<sup>22</sup>

By 2018, Atomwaffen Division’s website included a range of materials dubbed ‘propaganda’ that were, like National Action’s, clearly neo-Nazi. Such material was distributed publicly, and featured text and graphics making repeated reference to the Nazi regime, often featuring the swastika symbol alongside references to Hitler and Nazi-era anti-Semitic imagery.<sup>23</sup>



The group’s relationship with neo-Nazism was also developed by its praise for James Mason, a former member of the 1960’s American Nazi Party, who had published a book steeped in neo-Nazi idealization of armed revolution, *Seige*. Widely ignored by the wider neo-Nazi movement until Atomwaffen Division rediscovered him, the group developed a content-rich webpage, [siegeculture.biz](http://siegeculture.biz) that is currently offline, to promote Mason’s ideas.<sup>24</sup> Mason venerated many taboo ideas, and had been contact with serial killer Charles Manson during the 1980s, seeing him as another guru figure alongside Hitler.<sup>25</sup> Like National Action, Atomwaffen Division also idealized terrorism from the extreme right, for example praising the lone-actor terrorist Dylan Roof and describing Anders Breivik, Ted Kaczynski and Timothy McVeigh as the ‘father, the son, and the holy spirit’.<sup>26</sup>

Using its propaganda material, Atomwaffen Division has engaged in a range of small-scale direct action activity. This has included distributing neo-Nazi fliers and other material at American universities, and even joining a ‘White Lives Matter’ demonstration outside the offices of the Anti-Defamation League in Houston, Texas. The Daily Stormer, another US group particularly noted for its overtly neo-Nazi website, has regularly praised these incidents. Its members also attended the



notorious 12 August 2017 Unite the Right demonstration in Charlottesville. As well as more high-profile activities, ProPublica noted that since 2016 the group had organized training camps, which included sessions on using assault rifles.<sup>27</sup> By 2018, five of its members had been linked to murders, which will be discussed below.

While more details on the exact nature of the group remain limited, investigations by watchdog groups such as the Southern Poverty Law Center and the Anti-Defamation League highlight that the organization continues to be active, with members estimated to be in the low hundreds. Its current activities are difficult to detect, given that it now operates in a largely clandestine manner. It appears to be currently led by Cameron Denton, who has used the online pseudonym ‘Rape,’ typifying the extreme misogyny found across this milieu. His younger brother Grayson Patrick, who uses the alias ‘Leon,’ a reference to the Belgian fascist leader Leon Degrelle who is idolized in neo-Nazi cultures, is another key organizer.

Atomwaffen has also been reported on in Canada, and in 2018 *Vice* highlighted one activist using the alias ‘Dark Foreigner’ who was active in Ontario, producing propaganda material for the group.<sup>28</sup> Atomwaffen also have links with another tiny Canadian group, Northern Order.<sup>29</sup> The group’s interest in Mason’s book idealizing revolution, *Seige*, has also helped it establish a wider notoriety in online spaces, and among groups such as Sonnenkrieg Division in Britain.

**IRONMARCH MEMBERS IN THE GLOBAL FASCIST STRUGGLE**

**AFFILIATED GROUPS**

- NATIONAL ACTION**  
Great Britain  
Created with indirect IM influence  
Limited membership overlap  
(2016-17)
- SKYDAS**  
Ethiopia  
Inspired by National Action  
Very limited membership overlap
- ATOMWAFFEN DIVISION**  
United States of America  
Directly created by IM Members
- ANTIPODEAN RESISTANCE**  
Australia  
Directly created by IM Members
- CREATE YOUR OWN**  
Create a group in your own country!  
Join IRONMARCH and learn how to!

**SUPPORTED GROUPS**

- NORDIC RESISTANCE MOVEMENT**  
Nordic Countries  
Widely supported on IM  
IM members in the ranks
- GOLDEN DAWN**  
Ireland  
Widely supported on IM  
IM members in the ranks
- CASA POUND**  
Italy  
Widely supported on IM  
No IM members in the ranks
- SERBIAN ACTION**  
Serbia  
Supported on IM  
IM members in the ranks
- AZOV**  
Ukraine  
Supported on IM  
No IM members in the ranks

**IRONMARCH GLOBAL FASCIST FRATERNITY**

Members all over Europe, North and South America, Australia and other countries.

Majority of active members conduct activism through Affiliated and Supported Groups, or are engaged in creation of new Groups, utilizing the knowledge, materials and help provided by IM.

**IRONMARCH.ORG 2011-2017**  
HONOUR TRUTH - WAGE WAR - HAVE FUN

## *Antipodean Resistance*

Also linked to the same milieu, especially via the ironmarch.org web forum, is Antipodean Resistance, an Australian organization that has developed a very similar style of neo-Nazi youth activism. The group was founded in 2016. According to an interview with the neo-Nazi website Daily Stormer, its activists saw National Action as ‘the best model for a new group of young men’ and were inspired to develop their own group. This interview explained that the National Socialist German Workers Party and the Nordic Resistance Movement were also inspirational for Antipodean Resistance activists. Explaining the aims of the group, it added:

Our immediate goals are to gather all fanatical National Socialist young Australians into one youth movement, and not only be politically active, but also embody our worldview as National Socialists. We have high standards for personal behaviour, and won’t tolerate laziness or degeneracy, and are always seeking to improve ourselves. We’ll continue doing what we’re doing now, which is mainly posterings, stickering, and physical activities, but will move on to rallies and demonstrations in the future.<sup>30</sup>

Like National Action and Atomwaffen Division, Antipodean Resistance claims it takes its National Socialist beliefs seriously. Its website adds the group is not a political party and likens itself not to the NSDAP itself but rather a Hitler Youth organization for the twenty-first century.<sup>31</sup>

By 2018, Antipodean Resistance claimed to have around 300 activists across chapters in Adelaide, Ballarat, Bathurst, Bega, Bendigo, Brisbane, Devonport, Gold Coast, Hobart, Launceston, Melbourne, Newcastle, Perth, Sunshine Coast, Sydney, Toowoomba and Townsville.<sup>32</sup> Some of its higher profile activities include placing stickers at universities, including Queensland and Sydney, and targeting Chinese students in Melbourne by developing Chinese language posters.<sup>33</sup> In January 2019, it defaced the entrance to a Jewish old people’s home in Melbourne with swastikas featuring the group’s name.<sup>34</sup>

Like National Action and Atomwaffen Division, it has also been active on Twitter, YouTube and alternative social media sites such as Gab. Online content has included expressions of support for the same ideas as Atomwaffen Division, for example a Tweet from December 2017 stated ‘Read SIEGE by James Mason!’, while another from Atomwaffen Division from 2017 stated ‘Heil Hitler, and good luck+best wishes from the Atomwaffen Division!’.<sup>35</sup>

National Action and its follow-on groups, as well as Atomwaffen Division and Antipodean Resistance, clearly share a kindred brand of clandestine neo-Nazi youth activism. As noted, they were able to discover each other through ironmarch.org. This overtly neo-Nazi and anti-Semitic web forum was founded by a Russian activist, Alexander Slavros, and was active from 2011 until it

was closed down for undisclosed reasons in November 2017.<sup>36</sup> Typifying its tenor, its main webpage featured the banner: ‘GAS THE KIKES, RACE WAR NOW, 1488 BOOTS ON THE GROUND’.<sup>37</sup> The Southern Poverty Law Center has conducted a detailed analysis of the web forum, and showed that the website has a wider relevance, also actively supporting groups including Serbian Action, Italy’s Casa Pound, Greece’s Golden Dawn, Lithuania’s Skydas and Ukraine’s Azov Battalion.

While ironmarch.org is no longer operational, despite a brief reactivation in the spring of 2019, a replacement website, fascistforge.com, was set up in February 2018 to continue the role of ironmarch.org. This was created by a moderator using the pseudonym ‘Mathias’, who explained: ‘My only desire for this site is to remain faithful to the message and worldview laid out by Slavros/Ironmarch.’ The Anti-Defamation League highlights this too has become a space where the ideas of Atomwaffen Division, Sonnenkreig Division and other likeminded groups can gather, and share in idealization of terrorists such as Anders Breivik, discuss books such as Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*, and find out more about neo-Nazism of previous generations such as James Mason and charismatic leader of the 1960s American Nazi Party George Lincoln Rockwell.<sup>38</sup> In sum, ironmarch.org and now fascistforge.com allowed activists to conceive of their activism as set within a wider network of global neo-Nazism.

Returning to the cultic milieu theme, it helps us see how a range of discrete groups has emerged from a shared, oppositional neo-Nazi culture, which is now largely disseminated online. Each group connected to this wider cultic milieu aspires to revolutionary ideals in the long term and consider themselves part of a broader movement advocating neo-Nazi ideals. What are these ideas, and why to some activists find them so inspirational?

## **Faith in a new order, and the neo-Nazi cultic milieu**

The cultic milieu concept not only helps understand the dynamics of neo-Nazi networks, with each discrete organization emerging from a wider shared culture of radical opposition, it can also help explain the appeal of its ideas. The concept focuses attention on a sense of seekership, mission and quest for a ‘higher’ cause derived from these clandestine worldviews, ideals that are often held together through conspiracy theory thinking. Academic specializing in the study of fascism and the extreme right have long been interested in these types of cultural dynamics, and recognize they help convey a sense of meaning and purpose to such activism.<sup>39</sup> Theorists such as Roger Griffin stress they are driven by an ideology that on the one hand diagnoses liberal democracies as inherently weak and decadent, and so posing an existential threat to the continued existence of the race; and on the other idealize some sort of total transformation to overthrow liberal democracy to restore and revitalize the race. This myth of rebirth and regeneration of the nation and race (what he calls palingenesis) are often central within such cultures, and allow activists to consider their small-scale endeavors as part of a much grander historical mission.<sup>40</sup>

Neo-Nazi cultures often draw on evocative recollections of the fascist past, from affective memories of Hitler to hagiographies of more recent postwar ‘legends’ of the movement. Academics including Martin Durham,<sup>41</sup> and Chip Berlet have found the relationship between evocations of faith and extreme right activism particularly important to understand.<sup>42</sup> For Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke the use of esoteric cultic symbols and ideas was central to understanding the appeal of neo-Nazism and other forms of fascism in the post-1945 period.<sup>43</sup> With these approaches in mind, we can ask questions about the ways evocations of faith and the belief in something higher underpinning the movement are evoked by these groups.

Turning firstly to material developed by National Action, what is particularly striking is the way it drew on an eclectic range of ideas and reference points to frame its activism as seeking a revolution in the name of a higher cause. For example, its early Strategy and Promotion document, as well as talking about evoking a striking ‘look,’ also discussed positively the idea of Social Credit. Created by C. H. Douglas, this is a long-standing alternative economic system favored by many in the British far right, deemed appealing as it offers a vision of a non-capitalist economy.<sup>44</sup> National Action explained to its activists it sought to create an economic system for the white race, and denounced Marxism as the economics of the third world, while also stressing capitalist bankers were responsible for the disempowerment of white people.<sup>45</sup>

Intellectualizing the revolution was discussed in greater depth in 2014, when National Action developed another key document, a 44-page PDF file called *Attack*. This included glowing discussion and lengthy quotes of Oswald Mosely, leader of the interwar British Union of Fascists. It also discussed in detail the need to create a new form of faith, and a new man, for example as follows:

... we too must answer with our own political faith, exchanging a defence for the battle-cry of attack which will summon the best of our people. Out of the catharsis will come a new type of man who doesn’t flinch – whether it is a soldier or a politician ... It is time for a conversation between the best of us that will see general concepts moulded into a sharp political program, and generic nationalism into a political faith.<sup>46</sup>

Activists needed to believe in the cause and see it as a higher calling. There was even idealization of Lenin’s notion of the revolutionary Vanguard, taken as inspiration for the group’s future tactics. This lesson from history showed that a small, ideologically dedicated group could take over a country in chaos:

The title of ‘old Bolshevik’ went to the 44,000 cadres who carried out the October Revolution 1917, whom Lenin called the ‘thinnest layer’ – that is out of a nation of 120 million people who submitted to their complete rule. Their successful revolution and establishment of a totalitarian state was a success story that came down to one

important factor, and we would do well to learn from their method because the parallels we can draw to the situation today are more than you might think.<sup>47</sup>

National Action was rekindling a British fascist tradition, but argued it needed to build on the past by supplementing it with a new set of tactics, drawn from other successful revolutionaries. From Lenin they showed the size of the group was not important, what mattered was ideological commitment, and even faith in a new political religion.

Other National Action material similarly praised the idea of the vanguard nature of the group, and its identification with older forms of fascism. An article called ‘Why the need for a Vanguard Movement?’ explained the successes of groups such as the Falange in 1930s Spain and the Iron Guard in interwar Romania were due to this quality: ‘The key realisation which lay behind the success of these organisations was simple: quality over quantity. Spirit must prevail over matter and that a dozen determined men can overcome a disorganised rabble of one hundred.’<sup>48</sup> Another article, ‘Nationalism is for stormtroopers, not plebs’, continued the theme. It argued that British people were subject to genocide, and that true nationalists should not dilute their message but be proud of their racism and anti-Semitism, and take inspiration from similarly uncompromising groups Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Ukraine and Poland.<sup>49</sup> In a time of existential crisis, any moderation would lead to defeat.

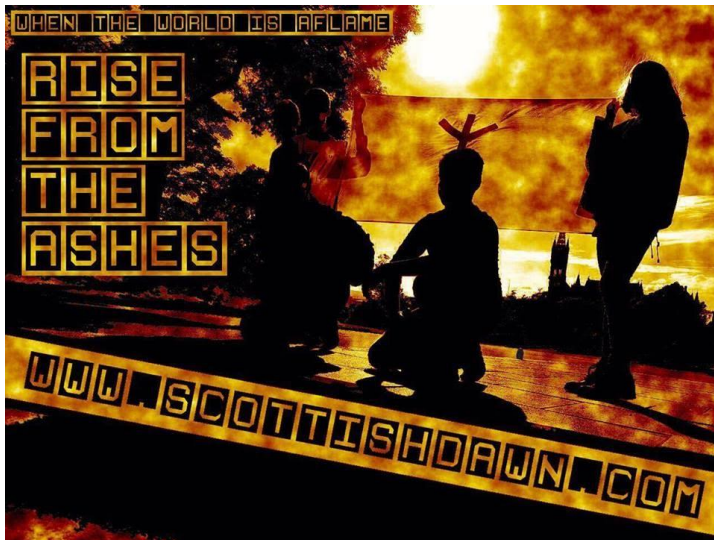
Another essay was titled, ‘The Necessity of White Jihad,’ a term National Action had adopted by 2016, and also adopted by Atomwaffen Division. It explained the use of the term was both ironic, and able to convey a core statement of the group’s revolutionary intent:

The role of the White Jihad is twofold. On one level it is satire, it is so ridiculous that it mocks comparison – humour is the most fantastic weapon because with it we can make ourselves understood while alienating those who are driving the narrative ... At the same time it is also a signal that is consistent with our beliefs; here we advertise that we are open challengers to the system, that we are world changers, that our faith is as strong as any religion, and that we have staked our claim.<sup>50</sup>

In these ways, National Action material was replete with a discourse that used terms such as ‘genocide’ to argue the white race faced an existential attack. Set alongside this are claims that liberalism was the enemy of white people, and that only a revolution to overthrow the present order and replace it with a new political and social system in favor of the white race, could solve this crisis.

After its proscription, some of the follow-on groups also played with a sense of the mythic and the cultic. Scottish Dawn took as its symbol the *Lebensrune* or Life Rune, often used in neo-Nazi culture and popularized by the American group the National Alliance from the 1970s onwards.<sup>51</sup>

Moreover, its slogans could evoke the same drive for a new era emerging from a decaying world. One webpage on its now defunct website featured the slogan, ‘When the world is aflame, rise from the ashes’.<sup>52</sup>



NS131’s website, <https://logr.org/ns131/>, is clearly anti-systemic in tone. It features images of graffiti with slogans such as ‘Destroy Capitalism’; images of the *Sonnenrad* or Black Sun logo, another symbol regularly used in Nazi-era imagery and widely adopted by neo-Nazi groups;<sup>53</sup> and support for Rudolf Hess, a well-known martyr figure for the wider neo-Nazi movement.<sup>54</sup>

Sonnenkreig Division’s material was located on a now deleted Gab account, though often it directed people to the seigculture.biz website for more information about the group. Again, this site featured the Black Sun symbol. Moreover, as the anti-fascist watchdog Hope not Hate have highlighted, Andrew Dymock of Sonnenkreig Division is a believer in an occult variant of neo-Nazism called the Order of the Nine Angles. Its mythology argues history is divided into Aeons, and sees a transformation in the future when the Western Aeon passes and a new time of Imperium can begin. Steeped in satanic rituals that idealize Hitler and decry Judeo-Christianity, it also claims its followers should identify with rapists and murderers whose lives epitomize radical opposition to mainstream values, and even suggests believers should carry out criminality and murder as part of the movement’s aim to overthrow the present system.<sup>55</sup> Steeped in extreme, cultic opposition to wider society, the appeal of the mythology of the Order of the Nine Angles is a strong fit with the wider neo-Nazi cultic milieu.

As well as being of interest to British figures, the Order of the Nine Angles has also been promoted by some within Atomwaffen Division. According to one report by The Daily Beast, its leader, Denton, has been particularly keen to endorse Order of the Nine Angles material, since at least 2014. However, others in Atomwaffen Division have been put off by its growing influence in the organization, and several explained on Atomwaffen Division chat sites that this was pushing them

out of the group.<sup>56</sup> Several books related to the Order of the Nine Angles also feature on the Library section of Atomwaffen Division's seigculture.biz website.<sup>57</sup>

As well as interest in the occultic Order of the Nine Angles, other elements of Atomwaffen Division's materials highlight a wider fascination with the cultic and the esoteric. Its library includes e-books of Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, as well as books on the ideals of revolutions, paganism, Odinism and William Pierce's neo-Nazi faith Cosmotheism, alongside books by George Lincoln Rockwell and *The Turner Diaries*, a notorious text promoting an armed revolution in the name of the white race. The website also includes a link to a copy of Mason's book *Siege*, a text that once again outlines the need for a Nazi-inspired revolution through violence, once the current system falls into decay. It even featured books to help add intellectual gravitas to the movement, from philosophers such as Plato and Nietzsche.

As such, the seigculture.biz website was another a trove of neo-Nazi cultic messaging, and here individual activists could immerse themselves in a wide range of counter-systemic literature. Its homepage includes messages that speak to the idea of accepting a new worldview to purify one's mind, such as:

... we are by necessity adherents and fanatical practitioners of the Universal Order. This basic philosophy proclaims that every action that occurs – everything that is invented, created, transformed or improved – begins with the Mind ... We have cleared ourselves from all dogmas and System-think garbage that pollutes the Mind of the common American, reverting to our instinctive nature. Once you rid yourself of the rotten System-think, you will be left with the Worldview – a task of utmost importance.<sup>58</sup>

A sense of religious-like conversion could also often be evoked, through statements such as:

While we the conventional would have knowledge of God, we ask where is God? Is God Dead? The dead now raised a great tumult, to be alive is to have the key to the gates of Universal Order. The enigma has been activated, and will remain clandestine except to those who go through the gate.<sup>59</sup>

As well as proposing the worldview of Atomwaffen Division is a religious one, the website idealized previous generations of neo-Nazis. Again, there was much focus on Rockwell's American Nazi Party. One post included a set of scans for the 1960s group's magazine, *Stormtrooper*.<sup>60</sup> Rockwell was also promoted in other articles, including many by his former comrade James Mason. One such essay, 'The Rockwell Century,' explained he gave his life to the movement, and uniquely understood the urgency needed to foster revolutionary change. 'Legends aren't easily made and it is the true test of a genuine legend when – as it was and remains – that the lying, manipulating,

opinion-forming and taste-making enemy media does its very damndest to see to it that the person is literally BURIED from the sight of the public, and still the legend not only lives on but grows.’<sup>61</sup> Mason’s articles also regularly articulated a sense of faith in the ‘higher’ cause of the movement. For example, one engaged with the Bible stating: ‘As part of Ephesians, Chapter 6, Verses 10 through 20, it is stated to put on the full armor of the Lord. We, at Siegeculture.com, have as our motto, “Toward a higher awareness.” It is the same thing.’<sup>62</sup> Religion could be retooled to offer a seemingly beguiling call to act upon ‘higher’ principles.

As well as Mason’s contributions, another article on siegeculture.biz, ‘Mark of the Beast’ by Vincent Snyder (probably written by Denton as this is a pseudonym he often uses online), set out similar themes. It claimed that the book of Revelation offered ‘a damn-near portrayal of the current trends that are a culminating build up since the fall of the Third Reich’. The essay concluded by arguing that, while Christianity itself was outdated and irrelevant, the martyrdom of both Jesus and later Hitler evoked the idea of an existential battle against a system, one that was needed to overturn chaos and decay.<sup>63</sup> Another essay, ‘Arioperennialism,’ featured quotes from both Nazi ideologue Alfred Rosenberg and Hitler himself. It argued that there was an

unwavering priority of Aryan blood and eternity over specific sectarian and historical preferences. Individual sects and cycles grow and wither throughout history, products of their own times and places. Conversely, the radiant bloodline and genius of the Aryan has the potential to last forever if we successfully secure, repair and continue to evolve it to higher feats.<sup>64</sup>

In other words, activists needed to identify with their eternal Aryan blood heritage to understand their true destiny, loyalty to which was more important than to any single group.

Such themes of blood heritage and a sense of destiny were linked to the typically fascist ideal of rebirth, or palingenesis to use Griffin’s term. Atomwaffen Division’s website articulated such a mythology of social death leading to rebirth as follows:

The rest of the world is collapsing beneath us all as we speak. The system is beginning to suffer the consequences of its corruption. The failure of democracy and capitalism has given way to the Jewish oligarchies and the globalist bankers resulting in the cultural and racial displacement of the white race ... There is nothing that can be fixed in a system so inherently flawed, National Socialism is the only solution to reclaim dominion over what belongs to us. The west cannot be saved, but it can be rebuilt and even stronger without the burdens of the past.<sup>65</sup>

In sum, Atomwaffen Division’s materials, like National Action’s, are steeped in a sense of deep ideological purpose. While from the outside, they can appear as a strange, eclectic, even



bewildering, set of esoteric ideals, there is a rationale at play. Collectively, these ideas underpin the movement's call for a revolution based on Nazi ideals and help add depth to its diagnosis of the present political and social order as corrupt and in decay. As such, they help to give a deeper sense of meaning and purpose to the group's activism. The cultic is central to the how the group appeals to its small membership base, even though this can at times be divisive, as with the promotion of Order of the Nine Angles material.

Much of Antipodean Resistance's ideological material is similar in nature. It too presents the world through the lens of the decay of the white race and calls for action to halt and reverse this sense of existential decline. Its website is less overtly focused on the ideas of people like Mason, though notably it has promoted his book on Twitter. Mason even sent the group a signed copy of his book and has met with them.<sup>66</sup>

Other articles on Antipodean Resistance's website also help to spell out some of the core concerns of this group. One from 2017, 'Quality not Quantity,' referenced the inspiration of Rockwell, and again explained the movement aimed to cultivate an elite, a small band of activists who were ideologically true believers. In other words, it did not want to become a mass movement. As it concluded:

We want the *fanatics*, the people who care and who will fight, both during activism *and* during their day to day lives to bring about the beauty that is National Socialism. We want quality people who mean what they say and will *not back down*. We are striving for nothing less than the national rebirth of our people.<sup>67</sup>

Another article, 'Being White is not Enough', featured images of Hitler as well as American neo-Nazis Rockwell and William Pierce, claiming that it was 'not enough to be white, or a nationalist, or even a high quality, white, nationalist. You must be *all* of these, and ACTIVE.' To be neo-Nazi is not merely to hold a set of ideas, but to use these ideas to become active in some way. To help develop the argument, it quoted from the interwar Romanian fascist leader Corneliu Codreanu, again showing its identification with a wider fascist past.<sup>68</sup> Like other groups, Antipodean Resistance idealised the sense of activism being given meaning as a form of spiritual struggle. Its article 'The Fascist Mentality' explained that modern man was a child. Fascist intellectuals such as Julius Evola could help activists overcome this state, and find a way forwards. It continued:

Evola speaks of the close relationship between the physical rigors of mountain climbing, and the steps toward self-realisation. Even for those not well versed in esoteric thought, any who have undergone great physical struggle in unforgiving conditions, such as a mountain, will understand the spiritual contributions towards self-realisation that it brings.<sup>69</sup>

The article concluded that through physical endurance activities, such as hiking and

mountaineering, activists could connect with ancient truths by testing themselves.

Another essay, 'The True Alpha Male,' expanded on the type of honorable masculine ideal the movement sought to cultivate. In particular, it decried men who pursued multiple sexual partners, who it deemed weak and decadent, not alpha males as often portrayed in the popular media. The true role for alpha men was to find a 'mate,' have a family and ensure his children grew up strong and healthy. For her part, his wife was supposed to reflect the alpha male, and support him as leader of the family unit. 'The greatest moment of pride for an Alpha Male is when he watches his children follow in his and his wife's footsteps, continuing on the glorious cycle of nature and progressing the future of his blood into the next generation,' it concluded.<sup>70</sup> These more overt discussions on gender highlight the hyper-masculinity often underpinning this culture, found across the groups discussed.

Moreover, Antipodean Resistance has developed a specific section for women called the Antipodean Resistance Women's Alliance. According to its webpage, this group offers 'the antidote to the poison that has been delivered to our girls and women through the degeneracy of modern society.' Activities claimed for this group include gendered roles for women such as sewing, cooking and gardening, as well as hiking and self-defence, all to help women play their part in 'the survival of our race'.<sup>71</sup>

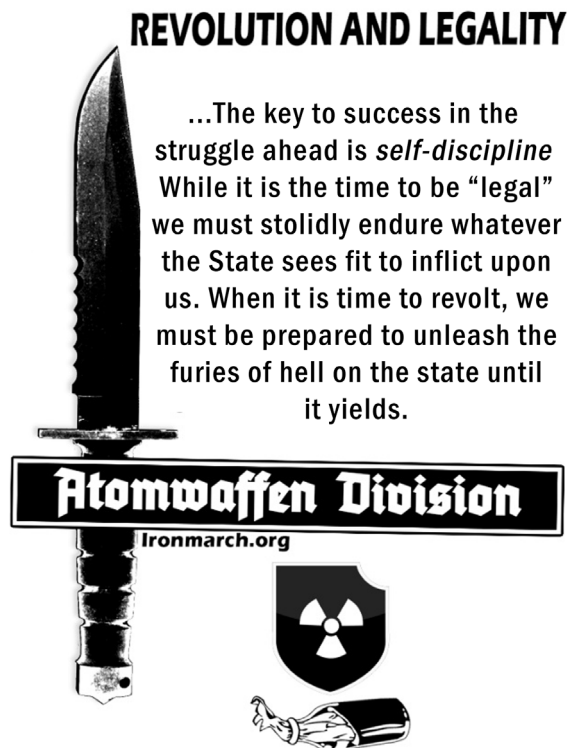
By surveying some of the material developed by these groups, it is possible to see the wide range of ideas underpinning the neo-Nazi cultic milieu. Each group has developed its own variant of seeing neo-Nazism as a higher form of being, and all style activism as a spiritual endeavour as much as a physical one. They all also consider the democratic world as in a state of corruption and decay, an often argue this is the consequence of a Jewish conspiracy. In opposition to this, they hope for a new era, one where democracy is overthrown and a new order will emerge in which Aryan identities become 'pure' and unsullied by these ostensible forces of decadence.

There are shared reference points too, taken both from the history of fascism in the era of the Second World War, and in more recent neo-Nazi contexts too. As well as Hitler, figures referred to include the Romanian fascist Corneliu Codreanu, and US neo-Nazis such as George Lincoln Rockwell and William Pierce. On occasion this culture can veer into esoteric occultism, such as the Order of the Nine Angles mythology, which has been particularly resonant among some British and American activists. Finally, there is also an overt gendered quality to this culture, one that is largely aimed at young male activists, providing them with idealised notions of masculinity to inform their identities. Some references to the roles of women show they too can participate in neo-Nazi activism, but in stereotypically gendered and subordinate ways.

## Typical activities and internal ‘breaks on violence’

While these groups often project into the future the vision of a violent revolution, and revel in extreme anti-Semitic conspiracies, what is also notable about their activism is that, typically, it does not cross into actual acts of violence. On occasion extreme violence has emerged, and this issue will be discussed later. However, it is far more characteristic for these groups operate on the fringes of legality, rather than step fully into the role of terrorist revolutionary groups.

One Atomwaffen Division flier explains the group’s attitude to criminality as follows: ‘The key to success in the struggle ahead is self-discipline. While it is the time to be “legal” we must stolidly endure whatever the State sees fit to inflict upon us. When it is time to revolt, we must be prepared to unleash the furies of hell on the state until it yields.’



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Similarly, the Introduction to *Seige*, the book written by former American Nazi Party member James Mason, expresses despair at the potential effectiveness of any acts of terrorism to create immediate change, and so violent transformation is for the future:

... things have reached such a decrepit stage that any Amerikan State of the Union sitting could ironically be blown to hell, killing every last political whore, bureaucratic pig, and shabbez goy in attendance, and the pathway toward imminent destruction

of the West at the behest of Jewish intrigue wouldn't be tremendously altered.

This was because the:

remnant White population is now so enslaved by debt, avarice, and ostensible affluence that most have unwittingly been rendered quite complacent in form and deed. Swarthy masters of international finance have adeptly positioned their god of mammon to ensure absolute damage control.

Instead activists needed to have faith that revolutionary change would occur at some undisclosed point in the near future and so:

... minor consolation is obtained when realizing that this current epoch of dystopia is a natural process entirely structured in accord with cyclical history. This present Ragnarök/Apocalypse/Kali Yuga time frame is pre-ordained, set to burst forth cataclysm that will advertently necessitate a healthful catharsis of all undesirable elements. From chaos comes rebirth and order.<sup>73</sup>

Such statements are curious for both legitimizing the idea of violent insurrection to overthrow an existing order, and also stating that the time for such action is not now. They evoke mythic ideals of rebirth in the near future to allow them to believe fate is on their side, even if the state is against them. Activists in these groups are often told in these ways that they should see themselves as living in a liminal time, a final era of decline and fall after which a revolution will inevitably unfold. Importantly, this creates a milieu that both fantasizes of, and perhaps at times even plans for, terrorist attacks designed to catalyze the revolution, but often does not actively call for such violence in the here and now. Rather other tactics are deemed more effective in the short term, and these strategies veer such groups away from the extreme violence that is also regularly idealized in their materials.

Exploring this theme, Joel Busher, Donald Holbrook and Graham Macklin have recently published work that analyses the 'internal breaks' such extremist groups place upon themselves, limiting their engagement in violence. This research helps to reshape the questions we ask when assessing the risks posed by extremists, such as the neo-Nazi milieus explored in this article. They identify five broad areas where groups will place 'breaks' on their own violent aspirations, and instead chose to find other ways to develop their activism. What follows will briefly survey some of the typical activities of National Action, Antipodean Resistance and Atomwaffen Division, relating these activities to some of the breaks on violence identified by Holbrook, Busher and Macklin. These breaks are as follows:

- 1) Identification of alternate strategies deemed more effective compared to violent strategies.
- 2) Development of a moral logic that inhibits violence.
- 3) Promotion of a group identity that is only willing to use violence in a limited way.
- 4) Limiting the legitimacy of targets in society more widely, deeming only some or none as valid targets for violence.
- 5) Development of organizational structures that institutionalize these breaks on violence, and limit the potential for unplanned acts of violence.<sup>74</sup>

The strength of this approach is not to argue that groups always decide against violence, or that they pose no risks. Rather it helps identify how a range of factors often push them into engaging in non-violent forms of activity as this is deemed a more prudent strategy.

Starting with National Action, before its proscription, some of its core activities were set out in monthly Action Reports. These tend to paint a much more mundane picture of the group's typical activity when compared to the focus on its potential for engaging in terrorism. These were broken down into regional reports of monthly activism. One of the last to be uploaded prior proscription, and remain archived on the Wayback Machine website, was from July 2016. It offers a snapshot of typical activities.

In the South West, activists were commended for running three activities, as well as conducting an ongoing stickering campaign that had received media condemnation and criticism from local Jewish people. This was seen as a very positive outcome. Another highlight was activists meeting members of the public wearing pro-Trump T-shirts at Cardiff train station, who were given National Action stickers to put up around the city. This regional group also put on a 'Hate Camp,' which was essentially a communal hike into the countryside around Cardiff, ending with the group enjoying the views. Finally, later in the month, it helped to organize a Welsh Forum event, which featured a range of far right speakers, including veteran activist of the British National Front, Richard Edmonds, Holocaust-denier David Irving, and National Action's own Alex Davies, among others.

Meanwhile in London, activists ran a four-hour 'fitness and combat training event', which included individual and group combat session, and ended with a camp and an evening social event. In Yorkshire, activists reportedly distributed over 1,500 leaflets in an undisclosed town, related to the emotive issue of Asian grooming gangs operating in the region. The day ended with some graffiti being put up on a wall. The report from this region highlighted a number of encounters with the public, registering support for the group's aims.

In the Midlands, a stickering campaign at Aston University followed by a graffiti session in West Bromwich was reported on positively. In the North East it was noted that Hartlepool Council had

passed a motion to condemn National Action posters and stickers, again seen as a small victory for the group. In Scotland, stickers were put on a memorial to the Spanish Civil War, and at the end of the month activists attended a demonstration opposing National Action held in Leith. Here, commentary explained that National Action opposed ‘communists’ it felt they encountered, but also added their activists at the demonstration sought to engage with members of the wider public, not physically attack them. There was reported confrontation with those protesting against National Action on the march, but this was in the form of verbal arguments not violent attacks.

Finally, the report ended with some further commentary on on-going events. Earlier in the year, National Action had run a ‘Miss Hitler’ competition. Commentary on the impact of this development highlighted it had the desired effect of attracting publicity expressing outrage, raising the profile of the organization. There was also a short section explaining that activists inspired by National Action were developing in Australia, and so it wished them well.<sup>75</sup>

From this report, we can see many of the brakes on violence identified by Holbrook, Busher and Macklin. Regarding break one, the report shows how National Action activists engaged in a wide range of non-violent endeavors, often designed either to maintain and develop its internal culture or to communicate its ideas with the public and develop a higher public profile. None of the activities described were violent, though around this time its online materials elsewhere celebrated Thomas Mair’s murder of Jo Cox MP. Regarding break two, although combat training was among the activities, there was no overt moral argument that violence learned was needed during any of wider encounters, even towards those it deemed specific targets such as ‘communists’. Moral justifications for carrying out violence were not articulated. Regarding break three, while a more confrontational element was found at the protest in Leith, here engaging with people in a non-violent way, even those deemed ‘enemies’, was praised. Again, violence was not seen as the most appropriate action. Regarding break four, certainly the group saw the wider public as potential allies, not threats. Members of the public were not seen as a target for violence, and were often discussed positively, even applauded for being people who the group could engage with. Regarding break five, the report itself focused on successes such as media attention, and the spreading of National Action messages abroad. Activists were not seen negatively for failing engaging in violent activity, and many ‘successes’ were deemed to have been achieved through non-violent activism. The messaging in the report itself was not advocate violence either, and rather celebrated successes achieved through non-violence.

So, while National Action’s activism in this month was certainly able to offend many, here at least it was not calling for immediate, indiscriminate violent confrontations or terrorism. Some acts were criminal though, such as the sticker campaign at Aston University, which later led to a successful prosecution of those involved. These stickers highlight the extreme messages put out by the group, and featured slogans such as ‘Multiculturalism Is Genocide’, and ‘Britain is ours – the rest must go’.<sup>76</sup> Moreover, condemnation from a Jewish person was seen as a victory for its activism, and so clearly this highlights the effort to spread concern within this community in particular. The

overall picture is of a small, unpopular and deeply offensive group struggling to spread its message through a range of direct action activities, while also putting on social events to engage its members.

A similar picture emerges from the Action Reports of Australia's Antipodean Resistance. One such report from September 2018, typifies its activities. In Victoria, Antipodean Resistance stickers were distributed, especially over others put up by the Australian anti-fascist group Campaign Against Racism and Fascism (CARF). It also targeted the Bundoora campus of RMIT University for such stickering. The regional group also removed anti-fascist stickers in Caulfield, Glenhuntly and Cheltenham, as well as Werribee in Melbourne, and replaced them with its own. It also hoped to put up another 12,000 stickers in the following month.

In New South Wales, the regional group targeted stickers at the University of New South Wales. Instilling fear into Jewish students was seen as a positive outcome, explaining 'it's no doubt that the jews on campus are now well aware of our presence, not to mention all the other degenerate denizens.' In Queensland, again stickering was the main activity, and these were posted 'from the botanic gardens of the Gold coast all the way to the Military garrison of Townsville'. This section also targeted Brisbane Pride, though with posters and stickers and did not talk about the need to violently attack the event. Some activists attended, and the report celebrated their capturing of 'a homosexual flag, which you will see again at some point in the future'. The extreme homophobia in the report was palpable, a reflection of the same sex marriage debates in Australia at the time. Its website explained 'these parades are excellent incubators for HIV/AIDS, and other various forms of filth.'<sup>77</sup>

Returning to the theme of breaks on violence, as with National Action the report demonstrated evidence of break one. Its main activities were non-violent and favored tactics such as stickers, posters and countering public events. Regarding breaks two and four, the public were regularly presented as people to communicate with and persuade, often described as being in agreement with the ideals of the group. A moral justification for violence was not articulated, though specific communities were seen as worthy of offending, such as Jewish, LGBTQI and anti-fascists. Regarding break three, although there was some evidence of more aggressive confrontation at the pride event, this did not celebrate a violent attack or claim the group had an inherently violent identity, merely venerating the theft of a flag. Regarding break five, as with National Action, the group primarily praised its activists for their profile raising activities, and failure to engage with violent confrontations was not seen as a negative aspect of their endeavors.

Atomwaffen Division has not developed Action Reports in the same way, but it is interesting to consider some of the activities identified as typical of the movement by the Anti-Defamation League in its profile of the group. Across 2016 and 2017, Atomwaffen Division engaged in a range of activities, though like National Action and Antipodean Resistance these were largely related to capturing publicity and spreading offensive messages. In December 2016, the group put up a flier

at the University of Chicago with the slogan ‘#HITLER DISAPPROVES: No Degeneracy, No Tolerance, Hail Victory’ and another at the State College of Florida that read ‘How is a diploma going to help you in the race war? Join your local Nazis.’ In June 2017, the group put out fliers at Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington that read ‘Where will you be when the race war begins? When the world burns?’ In the same month, the group also went to the University of Washington, posed for photos at the university’s Sieg Hall, and distributed fliers. Later in the year,

activists unfurled a banner that read ‘Hate Planet’ from a footbridge. A member also attended a White Lives Matter protest organized by another group, the Nationalist Front, in Shelbyville, Tennessee. Near the end of 2017, the group distributed homophobic fliers at the University of Western Florida.<sup>78</sup> Such direct action activism certainly allowed the group to gain publicity and spread its message, but again points to breaks on violence restricting its activities to less extreme endeavors.

The Southern Poverty Law Center also highlights some of the group’s main activities in their profile of Atomwaffen Division. In addition to the events already discussed, this overview highlights a video uploaded to YouTube (though no longer available) called ‘Doomsday Hatecamp 2017: M I D W E S T,’ featuring activists hiking and then in the evening burning the American flag on a campfire whilst performing a Nazi salute.<sup>79</sup> Again, this type of activity, the development of an internal culture by running events aimed at core activists, was not one designed to lead directly to acts of violence or terrorism. Since 2018, Atomwaffen Division has become more clandestine and less inclined to engage in publicity-grabbing acts, which may suggest a move away from breaks on violence, though this does not necessarily point to a more openly violent approach either.

In sum, considering breaks on violence within such neo-Nazi groups does not stop analysts from assessing their ability to radicalize and inspire acts of violence, which will be discussed below. However, it does help draw out the point that the typical activity of these groups is not to carry out extreme violence, shifting assessment of risk away from the narrative from media discourses that often presents such groups as on the cusp of terrorist acts, which often do not transpire.

This is because their inner culture is complex, and often leads to internal de-escalations on carrying out acts of violence. Long-term violent revolutionary goals are seen as for another time, while the immediate concern is often on growing the group, attracting publicity to help in this process, and to a degree spreading extreme messages. This type of activity both rewards such groups for developing the most extreme messages, as it allows them to capture media attention, and also helps instill a logic whereby not engaging in violence is also rewarded, as this helps ensure the groups become more long-lasting. National Action’s closer association with terrorism led to its proscription, and prosecutions have largely stymied it as an on-going concern even though there have been smaller follow on groups. This is not a problem the other groups have faced.



## Extreme violence and neo-Nazi activists

Even at the extremes of neo-Nazism, the inner dynamics of its most hardline groups tend to restrict violence to occasional outbursts not endorsed by the organizations themselves. While they may be more forthcoming in celebrating violence committed by lone actors unrelated to their own groups, from Anders Breivik to Dylann Roof, they do not actively seek to inspire such terrorism among their own activists. Nevertheless, while for the most part these groups do not engage in violence, on occasion serious plots and actual acts of aggression do emerge from them.

Regarding National Action, in 2015 Zack Davies tried to kill a man in a supermarket in Wales, while in 2019 Jack Renshaw was convicted of plotting a terrorist attack on a MP in 2017. Both men were one-time activists within the group. Meanwhile, other National Action linked activists have also been convicted under terrorism offences.<sup>80</sup> Atomwaffen Division, meanwhile, has seen five murders linked to the group, and accusations of fostering terrorist plots. While Antipodean Resistance has not been linked to such extreme acts of violence, Labour MP Anne Aly has warned that for ‘a terrorist act to succeed, it really only takes one person,’<sup>81</sup> a concern that is well founded based on the violent activity found in the other groups.

Recent debates on extreme right-wing violence have focused on how acts can emerge in seemingly spontaneous ways. For example, expert on de-radicalization Daniel Koehler has noted there has been a ‘revival of militant right-wing extreme groups, networks and incidents’, often emerging from individuals or small groups.<sup>82</sup> Driving this is a tension between the ideas underpinning such groups and their internal breaks on violence. As we have seen, they often promote radicalised ideologies that are steeped in violent tropes, but radicalisation, described by Dela Porta as ‘a process leading towards the increased use of political violence’, is combination of ideas and action.<sup>83</sup> While the organizational logic of these groups often veers activists away from carrying out violent acts, steering them towards other activity that while radical stops short of violence, this relationship is unstable. Radicalized ideas in principle are not always de-escalated in practice, and so they can help some activists behave in extreme ways despite inertia away from violence from the wider group.

Often violence that emerges as a consequence is of the lone actor type, and so the recent literature on lone actor terrorism is useful in helping unpick the specific risks of extreme violence that can develop within these neo-Nazi milieus. Ramon Spaaij highlights the important role played by ideology. He stresses this is significant as ideology can provide the moral authority often needed for people to feel the necessity to carry out a violent attack. Seeing society as morally corrupt, those who decide to engage in violence can draw on their alternate worldview to see themselves as superior, and justified in their cause.<sup>84</sup> In the case of neo-Nazism this can legitimize not only

symbolic attacks, but even fantasies that individual acts of violence may spark a race war.

Spaaij also highlights that loners tend to personalize ideology, blurring it with their own concerns. A good historical case in point is David Copeland, who in 1999 planted a series of nail bombs in London.<sup>85</sup> He combined neo-Nazi beliefs with his own personal homophobia, to rationalize some of his targets. He was also frustrated that extreme right and neo-Nazi groups he was associated with were not doing enough, and this helped him decide on the need for a series of terrorist attacks. Police interviews saw him explain his logic, and he hoped his violence would lead people to vote for the British National Party and turn against multicultural society.<sup>86</sup>

Another central voice in debates about lone actor violence, including from the extreme right, is Paul Gill. His behavioral analysis approach identifies ideology as forming part of the story of the radicalization of individuals, however this also combines with other non-ideological factors. He stresses that often such attackers show long-term vulnerabilities, such as a history of mental illness, previous criminality or on-going social isolation. Importantly, Gill does not use mental health as a way to explain away such violence, it merely forms one potential issue that can lead to greater vulnerability. Notably, a recent survey of lone actor terrorists by the Royal United Services Institute identified that ‘35% of the perpetrators reportedly suffered from some kind of mental health disorder [and] the estimated percentage [of such disorders] for the general population is 27%’.<sup>87</sup> For Gill, long-term factors combine with short-term triggers, such as a change in life circumstances such as losing a job, a dramatic change in a personal relationship, or another such factor creating a greater instability. Longer-term frustrations and shorter-term intensification of instability fuel a more intense search for ‘answers’, and so provoke a deeper interest in ideology as a way to find solutions to frustrations. In other words, radicalization can often be triggered by relatively banal, non-ideological issues, with violent attacks acting as a release for a range of frustrations, intensified and given meaning through an extremist ideology such as the types of neo-Nazism explored here.<sup>88</sup>

When examining some of the specific cases of extreme violence, or planned acts of violence, from such groups, it is possible to get a clearer picture of how personal instabilities and association with neo-Nazi extremism leads to violence. Typically, the most extreme aggression comes from those on the fringes of the group, not their leaders. The case of Zack Davies, a fringe member of National Action, shows how many of the factors discussed above come into play.

On 24 January 2015, Davies attacked an Asian customer outside a supermarket in Mold, Wales, using a claw hammer and a machete. He explained his victim, a Sikh man, ‘looked Asian,’ and Davies shouted at the time ‘This is for Lee Rigby,’ a soldier killed by two Islamist extremists in London in 2013. As well as attending National Action events, Davies was active on ironmarch.org,<sup>89</sup> and spent lengthy period of time alone, playing computer games. He also had a longer-term profile of instability. When he was 11 years old he was expelled from school, and admitted in court that by the age of 15 he carried a knife every day as he suffered from paranoia. The judge ordered a psychiatric report ahead of sentencing,<sup>90</sup> but eventually Davies was jailed for life after being found

guilty of attempted murder, rather than being detained under a hospital order.<sup>91</sup> Also, in its final form, the attack appeared relatively spontaneous. He had intended to attack his mother's boyfriend, but chose another victim at the last moment. An hour before the attack he had also browsed a website featuring beheadings, and was also interested in British IS member Jihadi John.<sup>92</sup> Davies's attack left his victim with life-changing injuries, and certainly neo-Nazism was part of his story. However, interest in National Action alone does not explain why Davies engaged in violence.

While Zack Davies's attack was erratic yet set within a longer trajectory of paranoia and frustration, Jack Renshaw's subsequent plot to kill the Labour MP Rosie Cooper offers a contrasting example of National Action fostering terrorist violence. Renshaw's interest in this milieu had been developing for some time, and he had been a member of the British National Party's youth wing, as well as a student at Manchester Metropolitan University, though he was expelled because of his beliefs.<sup>93</sup> Many British National Party youth activists moved to National Action after the group was founded. Renshaw was also gay, though clearly found it difficult to combine his sexuality with his politics. He turned to grooming young boys, including making one 15-year-old take pictures of his genitals and send them to him. He was later convicted of such child sexual offences in June 2018.<sup>94</sup>

This aggravating issue played a role in his plot to kill. In the spring of 2017, he started to plan to murder Cooper. In May, he researched online how to kill someone by cutting the jugular artery, and within weeks had bought a knife online. He also researched Cooper's itinerary and made other arrangements for the attack. The aim was to kill both Cooper and the police officer investigating him for child abuse offences. He also wanted to be killed by the police as they attempted to stop him from murdering his two anticipated victims. In July 2017 he disclosed the plot to fellow National Action activists. By chance, this included a man named Robbie Mullen, who by this time had become a disillusioned activist and an informer for Hope not Hate a leading anti-fascist watchdog. Hope not Hate in turn informed the police, and Renshaw was arrested and later conviction under terrorism charges.

Again, this case highlights some of the issues found with extreme right violence. Renshaw was experiencing a unique set of instabilities around his sexuality, and increased pedophilic tendencies. Alongside his ideological beliefs, this led him to develop a unique plot to kill an MP, in part inspired by the murder of Jo Cox, a terrorist attack he had praised in 2017; and in part seen as a solution to his personal situation. Once again, by digging into the finer details about individuals who plot terrorist action, it is clear that the extreme ideology of the organization is an important aspect, but other issues also come into play as well. These factors can help individuals overcome the brakes on violence described above, and lead to an activist believing that extreme violence is desirable, even necessary.

A similar blurring of the personal and the ideological can be found in the five cases of murder linked to Atomwaffen Division activists, none of which seem like clear-cut cases of terrorism. The first of

these came in May 2017, when Devon Arthurs killed two other members of the group. Arthurs, who was 18 at the time, was arrested when police were called to the Green Plant Smoke Shop in Tampa, Florida. He was holding three people at gunpoint but told police that there were two people dead in an apartment opposite. These were Jeremy Himmelman and Andrew Oneschuk, both fellow Atomwaffen Division members. Arthurs explained later that he had recently converted to Islam and had become frustrated by fellow neo-Nazis and their views. The depth of his conversion seems unclear, but this change in identity does seem to have been important to his growing frustrations with his comrades, leading to their murder.

A search of Arthurs' apartment also revealed fuses and the explosive hexamethylene triperoxide diamine (HMTD).<sup>95</sup> These belonged to another flatmate and Atomwaffen Division member, Brandon Russell, who later told police the group intended to target civilians, synagogues and even nuclear facilities with the explosives. Russell was charged with possessing unlawful explosives and sentenced to five years in jail in January 2018.<sup>96</sup> Again the case reveals curious details. Russell was fascinated by neo-Nazi terrorists such as Timothy McVeigh, and there does seem to be evidence of preparing acts of terrorism. The two murders though were the consequence of ideological and personal frustrations among fellow Atomwaffen Division activists.

Another pair of murders linked to an Atomwaffen Division activist came in December 2017, when Nicholas Giampa allegedly shot and killed the parents of his girlfriend. This occurred after they discovered his neo-Nazi and anti-Semitic sympathies and had tried to break up the couple. Giampa also tried to kill himself, but failed and was taken to hospital, and later charged with murder.<sup>97</sup> In a subsequent interview with the *Washington Post*, Giampa's mother explained her anguish at the event. She also gave details of her son's unstable past. He had been diagnosed with autism and depression at an early age and was bullied at school. He was convicted of undisclosed offences in 2016, at a juvenile court, and subsequently was barred from going online. Nevertheless, he was able to find ways to access the internet and became fascinated by Atomwaffen Division material.

In the months prior to the incident, he also gave other indicators of a growing instability, including mowing a large swastika into the grass of a common area nearby his home; and writing a note to his mother, that read: 'I use ironic memes as a way to cover up the fact how badly i want to blow my brains out'.<sup>98</sup> Again, the picture that emerges is complex. Clearly, engagement with neo-Nazi material was part of the worldview of Giampa and gave a sense of meaning to a troubled young man. Instabilities intensified in the months leading up to the killing, and a range of factors not directly related to his political views intensified his situation and were central to the direct causes of the two deaths.

A final murder linked to an Atomwaffen Division activist came in January 2018, when Samuel Woodward was charged with the murder of Jewish and openly gay classmate, Blaze Bernstein. His body, which had been stabbed over 20 times, was discovered in a shallow grave in Borrenco Park, Orange County, California. In August 2018, Woodward was additionally charged with a hate crime

linked to the murder and has denied both charges. According to ProPublica, Woodward became active in Atomwaffen Division in early 2016, and shortly afterwards attended a three day camp in Texas, that included weapon training and survival skills.<sup>99</sup> A former Atomwaffen Division member who spoke to ProPublica explained that Bernstein saw Mason's book *Siege* as representing a true higher cause, and believed that real Nazis needed to act violently. He was also fascinated by the 1992 – 1995 Bosnian War, as well as the German neo-Nazi terrorist group the National Socialist Underground, which led to the deaths of 10 people, mainly immigrants, as well as 14 bank robberies. Woodward posted shortly after the murder explaining he was contemplating 'the passing of life' and was 'truly grateful for our time together.'<sup>100</sup>

While Woodward is still facing trial, what this case also shows is the ways Atomwaffen Division activists became divided over whether this was a positive development for the group. Some were very upbeat. For example, Sean Michel Fernandez from Texas explained in a private chat, released by ProPublica, 'We're only going to inspire more "copycat crimes" in the name of AWD. All we have to do is spread our image and our propaganda'. Another wrote 'I love this', and another described Woodward as a 'one man gay wrecking crew'. Meanwhile, the group's leader, Denton, explained that the fact that a member potentially shared information about the group to the media in the wake of the incident meant there needed to be a purge of the group, while others also worried about possible informers within the organization. There was also on-going concern for Woodward's plight; now one of their comrades faced serious charges, surely he was the one who should be seen as the victim.<sup>101</sup>

These murders linked to Atomwaffen Division activists tell us a lot about the types of violence that can emerge from extremist activism. Close examination of these cases, as with those linked to National Action, suggest that the movement's ideology is only part of the picture when explaining a turn to extreme violence. Other non-ideological factors, such as long-term instabilities and short-term triggers, alongside personalization of grievances, all play a part in explaining such violence. These cases also suggest that such groups are not developing centrally directed terrorist attacks. Rather their role in violent radicalization is to help intensify and deepen wider vulnerabilities among some of their members.

## Conclusions

This article has offered a detailed explanation of the relationship between ideas and action in the neo-Nazi cultures surveyed. It has set out how such neo-Nazi groups develop and maintain transnational networks, through websites such as ironmarch.org. It has also shown how each individual group has emerged from a wider, radicalized neo-Nazi culture, one that helps discrete organizations find common cause with a wider movement. These groups also identify with a longer tradition of neo-Nazi activism and fascist politics, which they feel gives their activism greater legitimacy. It has shown that groups such as National Action, Atomwaffen Division and Antipodean Resistance all take their ideology seriously and identify strongly with National Socialist ideals. They see themselves as being in an existential struggle to save the white race, as well as a quest to foster revolutionary change in the near future. This culture is steeped in anti-Semitic, racist, misogynistic and homophobic arguments, and is deeply offensive to many. Moreover, they revel in the offence this may cause, especially to sections of society they deem as specific targets for their ire, such as Jewish people, left-wing ‘communists’ and LGBTQI communities.

However, while these groups celebrate their ability to cause offence, for the most part their typical activism limits the propensity towards physical acts of violence. They often run camps and other events to build a sense of community among their number and target public places for distributing their materials. These acts may be offensive, even criminal, but typically they are not violent and are designed to gain publicity and communicate their ideas. For the groups surveyed here, universities are notable frequent targets, as this allows them to connect to a younger, educated audience, and often members are or have been students themselves. When they engage with the wider public, they can seek to persuade through propaganda and personal encounters. Moreover, they are often relatively content to be small-scale organizations, with a limited impact. In sum, radicalization is often, though not always, restrained by internal breaks on violence.

While such groups typically place brakes on violence activity, and often chose to turn their ideals onto action in non-violent ways, they do pose an on-going risk of engaging in physical aggression. Often, violent acts will be committed by activists under the influence of such groups who decide for themselves that extreme violence is necessary. Typically, these violent activists are experiencing a longer-term set of instabilities, and their extreme aggression is triggered by short-term non-ideological factors. Socialized into an extremist milieu, the ideology of neo-Nazism can help to make violence seem normalized, and part of a solution to deeply held frustrations. In Britain, several neo-Nazi activists have also specifically been convicted under terrorism offences, such as distributing extremist material, possessing terrorist manuals, and even plotting to carry out a specific attack. In America, activists have engaged in murder, and again some evidence suggests efforts to plot attacks as well as acquiring bomb-making material.

The response in Britain was to proscribe National Action as a terrorist organization, which has not been the case in America and Australia. While this failed to stop all activity linked to its former members, it certainly stymied National Action's momentum, and gave authorities greater impetus to pursue the smaller follow on groups too. Proscription was effective in limiting, if not eliminating, threats posed by the group. Authorities in America and Australia, who still face similar threats by kindred groups, should look again at the British response. At the very least, they ought to carefully monitor organizations such as Atomwaffen Division and Antipodean Resistance as it is clear that they both pose on-going risks of fostering unpredictable acts of extreme violence.

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