THE INTERNATIONALISATION OF FAR-RIGHT TERROR? HISTORY AND EXAMPLES OF INTERNATIONAL FAR-RIGHT NETWORKS

Date: November 24, 2021

Disclaimer: This briefing note contains the encapsulation of views presented by the speaker and does not exclusively represent the views of the Canadian Association for Security and Intelligence Studies.

KEY EVENTS

On November 24, Dr. Daniel Koehler presented *The Internationalisation of Far-Right Terror? History and Examples of International Far-Right Networks* at the 2021 CASIS West Coast Security Conference. The overarching discussion of Dr. Koehler's presentation centered on ways that right-wing terrorism is developing, as well as the transnational aspects of far-right extremism. The presentation was followed by a question and answer period directed at a panel of presenters allowing an opportunity for audience members and CASIS Vancouver executives to engage with the content of each speaker's presentation.

NATURE OF DISCUSSION

Presentation

The primary discussion of Dr. Koehler's presentation focused on demonstrating how far-right terrorism is not a newly transnational phenomenon and illustrated ways it has been transnational for years. New and developing trends in far-right terrorism targeting a more international audience was also discussed.

Question period

During the question and answer period, Dr. Koehler discussed how counter-disinformation campaigns affect those already radicalised and those who have the potential to be radicalised in the future. In addition, Dr. Koehler discussed the necessity of offline relationships in processes of de-radicalisation.

BACKGROUND

Presentation

Dr. Koehler began his presentation by showing a photograph of a German youth wearing a Ku Klux Klan (KKK) t-shirt. Considering that the KKK is originally an American white supremacist group, Dr. Koehler used this image to illustrate the transnational nature of far-right extremist networks.

Dr. Koehler went on to present some data to demonstrate the increase of far-right terror attacks in recent years. He expressed that according to the 2020 Global Terrorism Index, there has been a 250% increase in far-right terror attacks since 2014. Further, there have been over 35 far-right terror attacks in the West every year between 2015 and 2020.

As Dr. Koehler presented recent arguments in the field that purport a contemporary internationalisation of far-right terror, he challenged this assertion and posited that there is nothing new about it. Dr. Koehler depicted various right-wing extremist and neo-Nazi groups to demonstrate the subsistence of well-established right-wing groups that have had international franchises for decades. Some of the groups he mentioned included the KKK, which has had an active division in Germany since the 1920s; Combat 18/Blood and Honour, which was founded in the UK in the 1980s and has 10,000 members worldwide; and the Hammerskin Nation, founded in 1986 in the United States, which is active in Germany and internationally.

In addition to groups that have international factions, Dr. Koehler expanded on other aspects of right-wing extremism that demonstrate transnational nature and permeate international contexts, such as music, clothing, literature, concerts, and rallies. While this subculture is more readily produced today because of the use of social media, it has always been present and highly transnational. Dr. Koehler also illustrated other far-right political organizations and movements, such as the World Union of National Socialists, created in 1962; the wave of neo-Nazi foreign fighters, who travelled to the former Yugoslavia to fight in Bosnian and Croatian wars; and far-right transnational influencers such as Garry "Rex" Lauck.

After presenting various examples to demonstrate that the internationalisation of right-wing extremism is not a new phenomenon, Dr. Koehler went on to illustrate what he considers to be emerging trends in far-right extremism, pointing to new modes of operation and new forms of right-wing terrorism. Primary differences

between current day far-right terror attacks and those of only a few years ago include live streaming during the attack and the online publication of manifestos before the violent event. The increased use of these online manifestos is additionally accompanied by an increase of connections between them by way of referencing other right-wing attacks as inspiration or declaring a personal connection or aspiration towards/with other publicly far-right actors. The glorification of the attack and the attackers themselves are the result of live streaming and publishing online manifestos, which provides a quicker narrative and can encourage 'copycats.'

Dr. Koehler provided examples to iterate that new aspects of right-wing extremism are the transnationalisation of the impact and the audience targeted by right-wing extremism. For example, during the Halle synagogue attack in Germany, the attacker spoke parts of his manifesto in English while he live streamed. The primary audience was not the German neo-Nazi community, but rather an international audience.

The publicity garnered by an attack targets a global, rather than national audience, pushing the impact beyond national borders. Previously, far-right terror groups used guerilla or insurgency style warfare in order to enable groups to continue perpetrating violent attacks as long as possible before being curtailed by law enforcement. This is in contrast to present day tactics, which use a single, high-impact and highly public attack as the primary mode of expressing and promoting their cause and furthering their political ideology.

Dr. Koehler went on to describe other new or renewed transnational themes and trends within far-right terrorism. This included a noticeably increasing overlap between organized crime and far-right terrorism engaging in drug or gun trafficking to garner revenue to fund their own agendas; the increase of far-right foreign fighters, particularly ones that travel to Ukraine; increased international collaboration for terror plots between different neo-Nazi groups, which sometimes include minors who are part of Telegram groups influencing each other; increase in chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) plots; infiltration of military and police; increasing involvement of young age/minors; and the ideological convergence of far-right militancy and Islamist tactics.

Lastly, Dr. Koehler depicted something he terms 'hive terrorism' as a new trend in far-right extremism. He described hive terrorism as extremists that caught the intelligence community off guard by appearing unexpectedly because they were not active in rallies or chat rooms. This poses a threat because they were previously untraceable by authorities and thus unknown to them as a potential

threat to society. This demonstrates the ability of organized neo-Nazi movements to approach individuals who may have been previously unreachable and the expansion of their scope and societal permeation.

Dr. Koehler concluded his presentation by highlighting that we will see more overlapping of ideological views, especially in the online environment. Some parts of the far-right have started admiring jihadists and their martyrdom culture while some jihadists have also started admiring the extreme right in Western countries.

Question period

During the question and answer period, Dr. Koehler was asked how effective it is to use counter-disinformation techniques to de-radicalise extremists. Dr. Koehler expressed the ineffective nature of using counter-narratives as a strategy to target already radicalised individuals because it creates psychological reactants. This often results in individuals becoming further radicalised as they solidify their ideology when they feel their core beliefs are being challenged.

Dr. Koehler iterated the success of primary prevention, which targets those who are not yet radicalised. This technique uses counter narratives to create inoculation against potential future exposure to extremist narratives and creates resilience for individuals to recognize things like recruitment attempts and see through extremist narratives being presented to them.

The challenge with large scale counter narrative campaigns is that there is no way to know which targets are being reached and or to evaluate the success rate. Although the campaign may be successful with those who have not yet been exposed to extremist narratives, it may serve to further radicalise those who are already embedded in extremist environments. Dr. Koehler expressed his belief that providing an alternative narrative in primary prevention techniques is necessary because otherwise the field is left completely open for extremist narratives to take hold.

When asked how effective the internet can be to de-radicalise extremists, Dr. Koehler asserted that pure online radicalisation does not exist and there is always an offline component. As such, in order to de-radicalise an individual there must be some offline component by way of a relationship between mentor and mentee. While the internet can be used to initiate contact between a radicalised individual and a de-radicalisation program, there must always be an offline, personal relationship.

KEY POINTS OF DISCUSSION

Presentation

- Since 2014, there has been an increase of 250% in far-right terror attacks.
- International neo-Nazi groups, far-right subculture, right-wing organizations, and famous neo-Nazi individuals all demonstrate that the transnational nature of the far-right has been present for decades.
- The use of live streaming and online manifestos during far-right terror attacks creates a transnational impact on the target audience and places emphasis on a singular and high-impact attack as the primary method of communicating a political ideology.
- Hive terrorism is an emerging trend that indicates individuals are being radicalised without having been previously known to the authorities and are thus coming 'out of the blue'.
- New or renewed trends in right wing extremism include the increase of neo-Nazis getting involved in the drug or gun trade; increase of foreign fighters; young right-wing extremists; increased collaboration between neo-Nazi groups; reciprocal radicalisation among Islamist extremists, the far right, and the far left; increased CBRN terrorism; increased infiltration of military and police; and the potential convergence of Islamist and far-right tactics.

Question period

- Counter-narratives cannot be used to de-radicalised already radical individuals because it often results in further consolidation of their extremist beliefs when they feel their core ideologies are being challenged.
- Primary prevention techniques can be used to provide alternative narratives to those who are not yet at risk of radicalisation but are likely to be radicalised.
- De-radicalisation cannot take place solely in an online context, an offline component is always needed.

SFU LIBRARY DIGITAL PUBLISHING