

War on Terror 2.0: The Rise of White Supremacy Terrorism

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Abstract

The rise of the far-right and white supremacy pre-dates the War on Terror. The lack of focus on this threat stems from an inherent legal-architectural design flaw, which has been in place since 9/11. Consequently, the global response to political violence perpetrated by non-Muslims is not handled through the legal framework of the "War of Terror." The reason has been clear for nearly two decades: Terrorism was not seen as a white problem. The rationale

for such position lays in the adoption and dissemination of orientalist ideology by power structures in Western countries. This ideology cascaded down to the masses worldwide via the mobilisation of media bias, which demonised certain ethnic groups and played upon fears of the 'other'. The attacks in Christchurch, New Zealand demonstrate that white supremacy terrorism is here to stay. This Policy Outlook calls for an impartial, adequate, and integrated response to this rising terrorist threat.



Source: Recep Şakar - AA

Orientalism Redux

Edward Said's seminal works have demonstrated how the Orientalist worldview was carried on throughout centuries in a remarkable continuity, depicting Muslims and Orientals in general as backward and irrational. In *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Said was also able to reveal how the centre of gravity of Orientalism moved from Europe to America (Said, 1993: 7) in a geographic shift, which was accompanied by an extension of Orientalism beyond academia, namely to popular culture and mass media.

Such a development has had profound repercussion on representations of Muslims, and consequently, these Orientalist clichés regularly find their way to a worldwide audience through the various types of media, such as film, news, cartoons and television. Research has revealed that Arabs/ Muslims are - more often than not - covered in media and cinema as potential terrorists; very little about their human dimension is ever discussed or broadcast (Hafez, 2000). In this context, Jack Shaheen (2003) analysed more than 900 films produced by Hollywood. He concluded that 95 per cent of the movies in consideration project negative imagery of the Middle East, portraying its people as heartless, brutal, and uncivilised.

An acceleration of this process took place after the fall of the Soviet Union and the disappearance of the communist menace. Among the reasons for this was the fact that the US establishment felt the loss of an "other" to compete against. Such concern was clearly

expressed by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell. In a 1991 interview, Powell stated: "Think hard about it. I'm running out of demons. I am running out of villains. I am down to Castro and Kim IL Sung" (Gibbs, 2004: 315).

Therefore, after the 1991 Gulf War, Western official discourse started brandishing the menace of Islam. This rhetorical strategy met little resistance, as prejudices already existed. Indeed, Islam was perceived to represent an obstacle to Western hegemony with its non-Christian philosophy (Butko, 2006: 149). Indeed, a monolithic Islam was perceived, particularly by the American neo-conservatives as a body of orientals, in defiance of the dialectics of history, seeking to defer the 'end of history' posited by leading Western intellectuals as the culmination of the inherent evolutionary progress of human civilization.

In the meantime, Western decision-makers became also anxious about the Muslim world's perceived demographic advantage. During the 1990s, approximately one billion Muslims contributed to a majority in more than forty-eight countries and were a rapidly growing minority in Europe and America (Esposito, 1994: 19). As the new "other", Islam was perceived as the main enemy within the West (embodied by the Muslim minorities) and outside the West (represented by Muslim nations). Subsequently, numerous Western highly ranked officials started denouncing Islam as a threat to Western civilisation (Hashemi, 2002).

War on Terror 1.0

In the "War on Terror" context, which took place after the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks (9/11), the Orientalist frame was immediately deployed to interpret the different violent episodes as an expression of the clash between Western and Islamic civilisation. This chapter was used as a self-fulfilling prophecy reminiscent of Samuel Huntington's *Clash of civilisations* (1996), according to which no peace will happen in this world until one civilisation defeats and dominates the other politically, economically, militarily, and culturally.

The Clash of Civilisation theory, which is mainly unsubstantiated (Chiozza, 2002), constitutes the backbone of the "War on Terror." As such, it paved the way for a mass-mediated demonisation process within the United States, which did not single out the extremist groups who are responsible for terrorist attacks. Instead, it took aim at Islam as a whole. The latter was depicted as being the sole reason for such attacks, and media audiences, especially in the western hemisphere, were bombarded constantly with representations that stress the backwardness, brutality and irrationality of everything Muslim.

At this juncture, Orientalism and the official institutional discourse on terrorism reached a state of symbiosis. The result was a proliferation of an “alarmist” literature, which included countless publications, to name a few: Bernard Lewis, *The Crisis of Islam* (2003); Steven Emerson, *American Jihad: The Terrorists Living Among Us* (2003); Daniel Pipes, *Militant Islam Reaches America* (2003); Robert Spencer, *Islam Unveiled: Disturbing Questions about the World’s Fastest Growing Religion* (2002); Serge Trifkovic, *Sword of the Prophet* (2002); and Anonymous, *The Terrorist Hunter* (2003).

Orientalist rhetoricians, who suddenly transformed into counter-terrorist experts, offered naive interpretations of the different acts of violence in the Middle East. These analyses conveniently chose to disregard the deep-seated economic, social and political root causes and preferred to read these episodes solely through the prism of religion and interpreted them as Islam versus Christendom. These Orientalist readings were so potent that no matter how frequently Muslims affirm the un-Islamic nature of violent, indiscriminate acts given that the essential metaphysical, religious and spiritual dimensions of the Islamic faith do not condone them, these acts were consistently and systematically referred to in the media as “Islamic terrorism”.

Media Bias

In this context, the media applied striking double standards when non-Muslims culprits conducted acts of terrorism. For example, Timothy James McVeigh and his associates perpetrated the Oklahoma City bombings in 1995 but were never referred to as “Christian terrorists” despite their affiliation with extremist Christian militias. Similarly, Jewish extremist Baruch Kappel Goldstein perpetrated the 1994 Cave of the Patriarchs massacre in the city of Hebron, in which he murdered 29 Muslims at prayer in the Ibrahimi Mosque and wounded another 150. However, he was never called a “Jewish terrorist” in the Western media.

One could hope that things would change over time, but it was not the case. White Supremacists, who conducted politically motivated political violence, were (and are) rarely – if ever – framed as terrorists. The mainstream media portrayed them as individuals with psychological issues. For example, during the political campaign about the United Kingdom European Union membership referendum, British Labour MP Jo Cox was brutally murdered (16 June 2016). The offender, Thomas Mair, a 52-year-old white male was motivated by political ideology, had years of affiliation with neo-Nazi groups, and carried out the attack while yelling “Britain First”, the name of a fascist party. Journalist Glenn Greenwald stated: “despite all of this, it is virtually impossible to find any media outlet calling the attacker a “terrorist” or

even suggesting that it might be “terrorism.” To the contrary, the suspected killer – overnight – has been alternatively described as a gentle soul or a mentally ill “loner”” (Greenwald 2016).

Preventing the allocation of adequate blame to the White Supremacist ideology, while absolving its members of their substantial legal, ethical, moral, and human responsibilities seem to be routinely exercised by Western mainstream media. Unsurprisingly, such behaviour has extended to the horrendous terrorist attack against Muslim worshippers in Christchurch, New Zealand. This heinous assault, which took place on 15 March 2019, resulted in at least 50 casualties and many more injured.

Even as the New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern identified this episode as an act of terror, Western mainstream media refrained from following her example, preferring to adopt the “lone gunman” and “shooting” frame. For instance, the Washington Post published the article with the following headline: “Main suspect in New Zealand shootings that killed 50 charged with murder, believed to be lone gunman.” (Stoakes, Mahtani, & Hendrix, 2019). On the other end of the spectrum, the British tabloid Daily Mirror went to the extent of romanticising the terrorist by highlighting his photo as an “angelic” kid, whereas the first paragraph describes the mass killer as “hard-working”.

War on Terror 1.0: Second Phase

The “War on Terror” constituted the perfect pretext for power centres within the United States, and chiefly those influenced by neo-conservative forces (and more recently White Supremacist forces) to accelerate the shift of the American state identity towards a racist and white supremacist worldview; a process that is intended to cause a domino effect on the European and wider Western common identity. It is thus no surprise that the vitriolic rhetoric, which originates routinely from the top of the U.S. administration, such as during the Donald Trump presidency (Reilly, 2017), is designed to depict Muslims as the quintessential “other.”

Since 9/11, Muslim communities around the world have been subject to unnecessary and disproportional counter-terrorism policies. Western nation-states – namely the US, UK and other European countries – shifted from the normative domestic criminal law and the law enforcement framework with a new phenomenon: counterterrorism measures. Nearly two decades on, Muslim communities worldwide have experienced a full spectrum of policies under the pretext of the War on Terror including stop and search, detention without trial, rendition, and the worst of them all extrajudicial killings via drone strikes. The phenomenon then focused on home-grown terrorism in response to the blowback of foreign policy intervention in Muslim majority countries.

The second phase of the War on Terror paved the way for a new layer: Countering Violent Extremism (CVE). This addition seeks to control the thoughts and beliefs of Muslims and Islam in a pre-crime space to the extent that the state would interfere in the choice of speakers in privately-held conferences in Muslim communities by introducing a no-speaker list or pressuring venue owners to shut down a particular religious convention.

States in the West have even introduced CVE programmes implemented on a national level which are designed to engineer Muslim behaviour socially and is designed to dictate to the Muslim community living in the Western societies how to think. The implementation of it is threatening with the force of law and policy, enforcing a state-led “good Muslim and bad Muslim” model.

The United Kingdom's PREVENT programme is a good example on how it places a legal obligation on public service employees including doctors, teachers and mere dentists (UK Counter Terrorism Security Act 2015, Part 5) to report any individuals they believe hold “extreme” views and are on the path to “terrorism”. This has resulted in questionable referrals blurred in a society strife with anti-Muslim sentiment and neo-conservative backed media exacerbating the link of terrorism with Muslims.

War on Terror 2.0: White Supremacy Reboot

White Supremacy is not a new phenomenon. In fact, it predates the War on Terror dynamic against the Muslim communities on a global scale. Even so, this phenomenon has failed to proportionally be on the agenda of counterterrorism and security services worldwide. Brenton Tarrant, a 28-year old white supremacist, stormed two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand killing 50 Muslim worshippers indiscriminately, including women and children, and injuring at least 20 others on March 15, 2019. Tarrant, who was apparently unknown to intelligence and

law enforcement agencies, carried out the attack while live-streaming the massacre on social media to reinforce the impact across the globe.

Two days before the attack, Tarrant posted pictures online of the weapons used to kill the Muslim worshippers (Bellingcat, 2019), without any detection by intelligence agencies. Those same weapons were used in the attack, and clearly visible in the live stream. Based on Tarrant's propaganda written on his semi-automatic gun, his actions were in the name

of former kings' who took part in the crusades. This is highly telling of his motivations of violence, and the ethnocentric rationale to reduce the number of birth rates by "immigrants" in Europe and what white supremacists deem to be the exclusive 'European' right to settler-colonial states such as New Zealand.

The acts of violence seen in Christchurch are not the first white supremacist attacks to occur against their perceived enemies. Attacks have been conducted against an African American church in Charleston, a Jewish synagogue in Pittsburgh and a mosque in Quebec. Thus, it is questionable why White Supremacy

and ethno-European terrorism has not been on the agenda of intelligence agencies worldwide – or part of the War on Terror more generally.

Unequally framing the War on Terror in incidences like these could be counterproductive and lead to a reciprocal call to action within the Muslim space – or retaliation by the young and impressionable influenced by groups such as Al Qaeda or Daesh – both groups who have already called for retribution, and referenced human rights discourse as a tool that only serves Islam's foes (AQAP, Telegram 2019).

A Manifesto of White Supremacy Terrorism

Moments before assaulting innocent worshippers, Tarrant disseminated a 74-page manifesto dubbed as "The Great Replacement". Its basic violent theory underpins that non-Whites – especially Muslims – are "invaders" in European lands, plundering precious resources and 'colonising white lands' through their high birth rates. It references the key rationale for the conduct of hostilities at Christchurch and sounds highly familiar to the rhetoric of President Donald Trump and the Far Right. For this reason alone, it is not suitable to sit idly and accept that Tarrant is a lone wolf working alone and is a simple deranged individual. Tarrant describes himself as a "regular white man, from a regular family," who decided to make a stand to ensure the future of his people.

What is more telling is the reason behind the attack: "To most of all show the invaders that our lands will never be their lands, our homelands are our own and that, as long as a white man still lives, they will NEVER conquer our lands, and they will never replace our people". When Tarrant is referring to "immigrants", he is specifically referring to Muslims. If there is any denial of this notion, the manifesto goes on to justify why he targeted the Muslims by claiming that "they were an obvious, visible and large group of invaders, from a culture with higher fertility rates, higher social trust and strong, robust traditions that seek to occupy my peoples lands and ethnically replace my own people".

"In every country, on every continent, those that are

in the minority are oppressed. If you become a social, political or ethnic minority, it will always lead to your oppression". This narrative is highly similar to the one often accompanying acts of hostilities conducted by Muslims in western societies. However, with this type of terrorism - which is not condoned by Islam in any way - there was an additional layer of a specific foreign policy grievance not found in the case of white supremacist terrorism such as the attack allegedly perpetrated by Tarrant.

Tarrant then goes on to highlight his erroneous thinking by justifying the killing of innocent children: "Children of invaders do not stay children, they become adults and reproduce, creating more invaders to replace your people" He added, "any invader you kill, of any age, is one less enemy your children will have to face".

The manifesto incites others to inflict acts of violence against the immigrant population in Europe and elsewhere, which under any reasonable society's legal framework would be classed as encouraging terrorism. In comparison, Muslims in the United Kingdom have been arrested and profiled by law enforcement and security services for simply being in possession of literature considered to be aligned with terrorist organisations. A more accurate parallel to Tarrant's manifesto can be compared with terror group Al-Qaeda "Inspire" magazine, whereby the propaganda justifies targeting non-combatants and civilians specifically in order to cause terror and chaos.

Why New Zealand?

There are numerous motives behind the choice of New Zealand as a location for the terror act against Muslim worshippers. Some of these motivations are ideological whereas others are organisational and practical. Among the former is the relative weakness of the White Supremacist discourse in New Zealand. Despite the use of the Islamophobic discourse by right-wing politicians, such as Don Brash, Michael Hosking, and Winston Peters, their political capital remained limited. In addition, Muslims are generally integrated into society. While cases of bigotry, especially against veiled Muslim women, were on the rise in the past years (Rahman, 2019), there were no major incidents reported. The inter-racial inter-religious harmony that persists in New Zealand was probably not to the liking of white supremacist groups, which live in a kind of imagined binary ontology. In their worldview, there is the West on one side, and the rest on the other side. For them, there is no possibility of coexistence or shared values, no shades of grey or colour, only black and white.

Furthermore, the brand image of New Zealand as a peaceful country continues to attract immigrants from around the globe, not least from the United States itself. Immediately after Donald Trump was elected as US president, immigration officials received more than 13,000 registrations of interest from US citizens hoping to move to New Zealand in one week – an extraordinarily high number (Tapaleao, 2016). Such a perception of New Zealand, whether true or exaggerated, placed this Southern Pacific nation on the radar as a mirror image to the white supremacist worldview.

Moreover, the fact that Tarrant's terrorist attack took place in Christchurch is also highly symbolic. With the aforementioned messianic views about the white man's religion, which excludes other racial and ethnic groups (e.g. African Americans, Latinos) and religions, the presence of mosques in Christchurch could well have been perceived as a symbolic desecration of a sacrosanct name. The fact that Tarrant dwelled heavily on the Christian faith to support his extremist political fanbase also means that religious symbolism is a factor not to be discounted.

There were other practical reasons too. Christchurch has been the site of several, albeit small scale, Islamophobic incidents. The latter were never seriously followed upon by police. Thus, the breeding ground for racism was there, but does this indicate that Tarrant operated in a familiar environment? Are there more white supremacists in the Canterbury district that offered logistical and other forms of support? In addition, the culprit was posting on social media in the days leading up to the attack, revealing his capabilities and murderous intentions. However, there was no follow up from police or intelligence agents. Similarly, the immediate police response to the terror attack raises eyebrows. Tarrant drove away from the first site six minutes after firing his first shot and managed to avoid the police officers racing towards the scene (Cave, 2019). Does this mean that Tarrant was familiar with the police response tactics? Could he have benefited from complicity within the law enforcement community in Christchurch? These are some of the questions that only an in-depth independent investigation can help elucidate.

Why Turkey?

Tarrant referred to Turkey and its leadership on numerous occasions throughout his manifesto, ranking Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan second in Tarrant's recommended hit list. Tarrant believed that if Erdogan was out of the equation in the region, it would pave the way for white supremacy to prosper.

The Turkish authorities have revealed that Tarrant travelled to Turkey on 17 - 20 March and 13 - 25

September in 2016, having visited popular tourist centres such as Istanbul, Izmir and Ankara. However, what is currently being investigated is why Tarrant travelled to the following less frequented areas: Agri, Edirne, Sivas, Mersin, Tokat, and Konya (Daily Sabah, 2019). This has raised questions on whether there are any potential links between Tarrant and local terrorist groups in Turkey, especially when knowing that he was in the country when two terror incidents occurred.

Moreover, Tarrant's manifesto threatens Turkish nationals, and by extension Muslims, living on the European side of the Bosphorus. The manifesto references the historical site of the Hagia Sophia and the aim to reclaim it from the Muslims: "We are coming for Constantinople, and we will destroy every mosque and minaret in the city" Tarrant warns. Another stark reference includes the desire to "drive a wedge" between European NATO members and Turkey - with the intention to force Turkey to hold its "true position" as a "foreign enemy force".

All these references are not random. It is clear that the Muslim victims, who were brutally murdered in Christchurch, were merely used to send a message. In the view of academics Schmid and Yongman, the immediate human victims of terrorism generally serve as message generators. The entire terror operation is thus a communication process, and - at times - the goal of the violence is to turn the real intended objective into a target of attention (Schmid and Yongman, 1984: 5-6). In this case, Tarrant seems to be seeking to incite like-minded white supremacists to engage in acts of terror against other targets, including Turkey. The Turkish leadership has taken the threat very seriously, sending a high-level delegation to New Zealand to offer help and support.



Source: Muhammet Fatih Oğraş - AA

The clear and present danger of additional terror acts taking place is further evidenced and triangulated with Tarrant's manifesto, whereby a clarification is made on why he chose to use firearms: "I chose firearms for the effect it would have on social discourse, the extra media coverage they would provide and the effect it could have on the politics of United States and thereby the political situation of the world".

How Should New Zealand Respond?

It is true that the compassionate leadership of Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern and the genuine solidarity shown by the Kiwi population has established a new threshold for a humane and inclusive approach. From a security point of view however, attention must be now directed to the Achilles heels in this instance, namely the inadequacies in the policing and intelligence posture. New Zealand must be systematic and impartial in its counterterrorism efforts. This starts by applying adequate measures vis-à-vis all sources of threat.

Charging Tarrant with mere murder would be a serious understatement for killing 50 Muslim worshippers, including children and women, and injuring some 20 others. Several media outlets have reported that New Zealand will not charge Tarrant with its terrorism framework because it does not fulfil the requirement of attaining a "political or ideological" motive as per New Zealand's Terrorism Laws (Daily Sabah, 2019). This

approach is grossly inadequate and disproportionate when dealing with white terrorism - or other hostile, politically motivated acts conducted by non-Muslims. There is an inherent legal-architectural design flaw that has been in place since 9/11, whereby the global response to political violence perpetrated by non-Muslims fails to correspond to the legal framework of the so-called War of Terror. The reason has been clear for nearly two decades: Terrorism was not seen as a white problem.

If this current selective approach continues, it will send the signal that governments adopt double standards: one for white supremacists and another one for Muslim communities, which will have the impression that they merely represent a second class citizenry governed by a two-tier legal system. Indeed, such a sentiment could transcend across Muslim communities around the world, carefully watching and calling out the discrepancies

in the implementation of the War on Terror framework they have experienced for under two decades.

In a similar vein, it is important to highlight that Tarrant committed terrorism in a society that gave him all privileges and access to resources to grow and prosper. He did not have current and actual foreign policy grievances¹. In addition, white supremacists have been insulated from flak from both the neo-conservative and liberal media, and have generally been favoured by state structures in Europe and the United States. The driving factors, which enable disenfranchisement in society do not exist in Tarrant's case, and this is an aggravating factor which should definitely put this murderous ideology on the top of the agenda when it comes to fighting organized terrorism.

The drive to tighten gun control is welcomed, but it should not be the sole answer (Al Jazeera, 2019). The government must consider how to combat the ideology at its roots and ensure that acts of terrorism do not repeat itself again. The lives of 50 innocent people are

far too many to dismiss as a fringe incident by a lone-wolf. It should be noted that this number of casualties is equivalent to the average yearly murder rate in New Zealand; a rate which was decreasing in recent years and reached a 40-year low in 2017 (35 victims) (Stuff, 2018).

As it stands, Tarrant has been charged with murder and there has been very little discussion over how the discourse of the War on Terror and extremism can and will or will not be applied in his case. What is clear, is that in the process of applying the framework of counter-terrorism, it is vital that New Zealand and other states do not repeat the mistakes applied to Muslim communities worldwide. Being disproportional in the fight against white supremacists, and not allowing them equality before the law, or access to due process will only give ammunition to their cause. In turn, this will lead groups and individuals like Tarrant to realise the self-fulfilling prophecy of the "clash of civilisations". The cycle of violence will then continue without end and outside the framework of the rule of law and justice.

What are the Implications of White Terrorism for the World?

Tarrant's white supremacist attack in Christchurch was not conducted by a disturbed individual, as some are attempting to conclude, as an isolated incident. White supremacy in the form of violence is not a new phenomenon. The world must counter the threat using all means within the boundaries of the law and due process. In context, far-right terrorist attacks have been on the increase since 2014 (Global Terrorism Index, 2018). This has been made possible as a result of a visible resurgence in far-right nationalism, dog-whistle politics and casual racism vis-a-vis immigration policies entering into mainstream politics across the globe.

Since Tarrant's attack in New Zealand, it has inspired an uptick of attacks against mosques in the western world including the United Kingdom. It is difficult to assess whether those far-right groups in the UK were influenced by Tarrant's manifesto, or by the live stream of the attack. Nevertheless, Tarrant's manifesto is made

clear to all: white supremacist ideology deems all non-White races as a threat to Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand. Thus, it is abundantly clear that white supremacist ideology represents a direct threat to all countries with a multicultural society. In a globalised world, this poses a serious political and security threat.

Tarrant allegedly obtained blessings for the operation from a clandestine Far-Right organisation called the Reborn Knights Templar. This suggests the existence of wider support. This group claims that army and police forces in western societies are sympathetic to the white supremacist cause. At this moment in time, there is no sufficient empirical evidence to make a clear link, though some media reports suggest there are traces of the white supremacy ideology within law enforcement in the US (The Intercept, 2019).

¹ Tarrant's manifesto does not reference any foreign policy grievance apart from the state of affairs regarding non-white presence on European soil. All of Tarrant's motivations are linked to historical and racial rationales.

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