

British soldiers arrested for membership in banned fascist group

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Four soldiers in the British Army and one civilian have been arrested by West Midlands Police Counter Terrorism Unit, on suspicion of preparing acts of terrorism as members of the outlawed fascist group National Action.

Of the four, aged between 22 and 32, three are from England and one from Wales. The military personnel are from the Royal Anglian Regiment and the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers. One of the soldiers was arrested by Royal Military police at the Dhekelia British Army base in Cyprus.

Reports describe one of those arrested as an “experienced soldier” at the Infantry Battle School (IBS) with responsibility for training and identifying private soldiers likely to have the “potential to be future leaders.”

This soldier is said to have met the others at a training course in Brecon, Mid-Wales. This is a centre used by the elite Special Forces regiment, the SAS, for training. The British Army’s web site boasts, “The commanders that lead them [armed forces overseas operations] are all trained at IBS, and the training they undertake is linked to current operations.” It adds, “[S]oldiers and officers are prepared for any operational situation they may face—conventional war, counter insurgency, security sector reform, peacekeeping or supporting civil authorities.”

The arrests, under section 41 of the Terrorism Act 2000, were described by an army spokesman as “the consequence of a Home Office police force-led operation supported by the army.” They were arrested “on suspicion of being concerned in the commission, preparation and instigation of acts of terrorism...namely on suspicion of being a member of a proscribed organisation (National Action).”

The police said the operation was “pre-planned and

intelligence led.” The *Daily Mail* reported that the military personnel were seized “after investigators uncovered ‘inflammatory’ far-Right material, including images and slogans, on encrypted social media site WhatsApp.”

No detail has yet been made of any alleged crime they were planning, with the police saying there was “no threat to the public’s safety.”

National Action was formed in 2013. Its members, often wearing masks and balaclavas, have carried out numerous acts of racist violence and organised anti-Semitic activities.

In 2014, one of their number told the *Huffington Post* that he admired Antonio Primo de Rivera (founder of the fascist Spanish Falange), 1930s British Union of Fascists leaders Oswald Mosley and Alexander Raven Thomson and right-wing author Wyndham Lewis. The group appealed to “white youths between the ages of 15-29 who are looking to become racial activists,” promising “flyers, stickers and activities will be provided free of charge.” The same year, supporter Garron Helm from Liverpool was jailed for anti-Semitic tweets to Jewish Labour MP Luciana Berger.

In 2015, National Action member Zack Davies was given a life sentence in jail for the attempted murder of dentist Dr. Sarandeve Bhambra, who was left with serious injuries after being attacked with a machete in a supermarket. Davies was reported shouting “white power” as he stabbed Dr. Bhambra. The same year, National Action organised a demonstration in Newcastle under a banner that included a large photo of the Nazi leader and read, “Refugees Not Welcome—Hitler was right.”

In 2016, photographs were posted on social media of National Action members performing fascist salutes in the Buchenwald death camp where 56,545 prisoners of

the Nazis lost their lives during World War II. Members of the group also gathered outside York Minster to make Hitler salutes while holding the aforementioned banner.

The group's leading figures have moved within a number of far-right groups. One of its leaders, Benjamin Raymond, was active in the New British Union, based on Mosley's British Union of Fascists. A picture exists of Raymond—who said in an Internet post, “There are non-whites and Jews in my country who all need to be exterminated”—carrying a rifle. In the same post he added, “As a teenager, Mein Kampf changed my life. I am not ashamed to say I love Hitler.” Interviewed on BBC radio in 2015, Raymond said National Action supported Nazism and that Adolf Hitler was “absolutely” a role model.

The group has links with far-right forces internationally. Raymond described as a “hero” Anders Breivik, the Norwegian fascist who murdered 77 young people at a Norwegian Labour Party summer camp in 2011. Breivik's act was the deadliest attack on civilians in Norway since World War II.

According to police figures, 22 members of National Action were arrested in 2016. It was proscribed in December of that year, following the murder of Labour MP Jo Cox by the fascist Thomas Mair.

Mair killed Cox, MP for the Batley and Spen constituency in West Yorkshire—during the referendum campaign on European Union membership—by shooting and stabbing her repeatedly. When he was brought before a court, Mair stated his name as “death to traitors, freedom for Britain.” This was a statement that National Action subsequently took as their own slogan, using it prominently on their former web site. They informed their social media followers, “Don't let this man's sacrifice go in vain.”

The arrest of the soldiers poses questions regarding possible connections between Mair's murderous assault and National Action. Another tweet emanating from National Action after Cox's killing referred to democratically elected members of Parliament, stating there were “only 649 MPs to go.”

The proximity of the ban on National Action to Cox's murder invites suspicion that more is known about Mair's political connections than was revealed publicly.

Announcing the ban, Home Secretary Amber Rudd

declared the group to be a terrorist organisation, membership of which was an offence carrying a prison sentence. Publicising, organising meetings for, wearing clothing or carrying articles indicating approval of the group was also made an offence.

National Action is the only British far-right organisation among 71 mostly international groups currently banned in Britain, although a number of Northern Ireland's right-wing loyalist groups have been banned for many years.

The existence of a neo-Nazi cell operating in the British armed forces is a dangerous development and one with parallels in other countries. With the turn towards militarism by all the major capitalist powers, there is a growing concentration of far-right and fascist forces within the state apparatus.

In Germany, the existence of a far-right network allegedly involved in preparing attacks against high-profile politicians has been revealed. Those targeted included former President Joachim Gauck, Justice Minister Heiko Maas, and the president of Thuringia, Bodo Ramelow, as well as Jewish and Muslim organisations. Later reports confirmed that the suspected terrorist cell was part of much more widespread right-wing extremist networks in the Bundeswehr.

In Greece, members of the fascist Golden Dawn work closely with the security forces, often under their protection. In the June 2012 general elections, more than half of police officers reportedly voted for Golden Dawn, with many police officers, particularly within the riot control department, members of the far-right group.

In Canada, five members of the fascistic Proud Boys organisation, who are members of the Canadian Armed Forces, disrupted a “sacred rite” ceremony by native Mi'kmaq in July. The Proud Boys describe themselves as “Western chauvinists.” Following a military police investigation, last month the decision was taken by the Royal Canadian Navy not to punish the five.



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