

After arrest of fascist Coast Guard officer

Report documents rise of ultra-right hate groups since Trump's election

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25 February 2019

The annual report from the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), published last week, documents a 30 percent rise in the number of active hate groups in the United States, from 784 in 2014 to 1,020 in 2018, a period that coincides with the election campaign and first two years in office of President Donald Trump.

The SPLC asserts that the connection is not an accident, citing Trump's encouragement of ultra-right and fascist attacks by groups either directly inspired by his racist and anti-immigrant tirades, or in general sympathy with them. These include the racist attack in Charlottesville, Virginia in 2017, in which one young anti-fascist protester was killed, after which Trump notoriously declared that there were "good people" in the mobs chanting, "Jews will not replace us."

Last year, the two most notorious incidents of ultra-right violence were the bombs mailed to leading Democrats and media figures critical of Trump by ultra-right Trump enthusiast Cesar Sayoc, and the assault on the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, in which fascist gunman Robert Bowers, who backed Trump's anti-immigrant campaign but thought it insufficiently aggressive, killed nine elderly Jews.

The SPLC summed up the rise of the far-right over the last year: "Surging numbers of hate groups. Rising right-wing populism and antisemitism. Mounting acts of deadly domestic terrorism. Increasing hate crimes. Exploding street violence. That was the landscape of the radical right in 2018."

The SPLC report came the same week as two additional events that demonstrate the connection between the fascist occupant of the White House and the murderous actions of a segment of his co-thinkers.

On Monday, Trump delivered an anti-socialist tirade

in Miami to an audience of Cuban and Venezuelan exiles, demonizing the Venezuelan government and reiterating his threat, first delivered in the State of the Union speech, to destroy the threat of socialism within the United States itself.

On Wednesday came the initial press reports about the February 15 arrest of Lieutenant Christopher Paul Hasson, an American Coast Guard officer of three decades, who had been planning for several years to carry out fascist attacks on media figures, Democrats and socialists.

Hasson has been in and around far-right circles for decades, but according to prosecutors, he began corresponding with Harold Covington, a now-deceased neo-Nazi living in Washington state, in September 2017, and began putting together a list of targets only in January 2018.

In fact, Hasson was first investigated not because police suspected him of planning terrorist attacks on political enemies, but because police suspected him of substance abuse. The far more serious matter of domestic terrorism was incidental to the initial investigation. This begs the question: Are there other fascists in the US military planning to carry out attacks on the left, independent of, or working with Hasson?

Hasson's preparation for terrorist attacks parallels similar developments in Germany, where neo-Nazi elements have emerged with the German military, some of them preparing to stage terrorist attacks that they hoped to blame on Islamists in order to create the atmosphere for a more general pogrom against Muslims and immigrants in general.

Hasson worked primarily in procurement, which means he would have been in a position to order and

route weapons. That he managed to work in the military for three decades without any red flags being raised is alarming. There has been no public reporting of any connections he might have formed within the Coast Guard or other sections of the uniformed military during his long tenure.

On the contrary, since his arrest, the corporate media has had little to say about the story, which has largely been dropped. The same goes for Hasson's commander-in-chief. When asked about the fascist Coast Guard officer on Friday, Trump deflected questions about the plot to assassinate members of Congress and many others, saying simply, "It's a shame."

When asked whether his own language bore any responsibility for the growth of fascism, he replied only, "No, I think my language is very nice." In fact, the Trump administration has systematically promoted the growth of fascism in the US. The xenophobic, militarist and authoritarian rhetoric spewed by the White House has emboldened existing far-right elements and attracted new ones.

The most ominous feature of Hasson's activities was his drawing up of a list of political enemies, potential targets for the arsenal of weapons he had assembled. Cesar Sayoc prepared a similar list of targets for his mail bombs last fall. In both cases, the proposed victims were major targets of Trump's twitter attacks and invective, including leading Democrats, media figures and politicians claiming to be socialist, such as Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. Hasson carried out research into the domestic details of his likely targets, including their home addresses and whether or not they had armed guards.

Hasson's arrest came only days after Trump made calls for "retribution" against actor Alec Baldwin for his portrayal of the president on "Saturday Night Live."

Ocasio-Cortez was one of those on Hasson's hit list. Hasson's internet activity reportedly included searches such as "Where in DC do Congress live?" and "Best place in DC to see Congress people," according to court documents filed at the time of his arrest.

Ocasio-Cortez issued a statement attacking right-wing media outlets for reporting details of her new home in a Washington, DC apartment complex on the same day that the arrest of Hasson became public. The *Washington Free Beacon* and the *Washington Examiner* both published descriptions of the property,

its general location (although not the exact address) and nearby stores.

"Journalists are sharing stories about where I live the same day it's shared that myself + others were targeted by a mass shooter," Ocasio-Cortez tweeted February 20. "All this paired w/ amplifying unvetted conspiracy theories. It's reckless, irresponsible & puts people directly in danger. This isn't a game."

There is every reason to take such concerns seriously. In that light, the conduct of the *New York Post*, owned by right-wing billionaire Rupert Murdoch, is equally filthy. The *Post* ran a report Saturday under the headline, "Where in the world does Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez live?" The nominal topic was her absence from the Bronx residence where she lived when she was a candidate for office. The story revealed, however, that the *Post* had staked out the address for several days while Ocasio-Cortez was in New York City. It also provided details of her new apartment in Washington, DC.

Regardless of Hasson's arrest, the fact remains that the far-right is materially supported and politically energized by sections of the ruling class. The publishing of Ocasio-Cortez's personal information should be taken as a serious warning by the working class. The Trump administration is carrying out its attacks on political opponents by the most undemocratic and violent means, resorting to intimidation and outright violence.

The Democratic Party is also politically culpable in the rise of the far-right. Rather than opposing Trump for his fascist politics or his chauvinistic tirades, they present him as a Russian puppet and promote the idea that Russia is to blame for all the problems of American social life. In this way, they promote a rival but equally right-wing political narrative and help cover up the growing danger of fascist violence in America.



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