

Trump threatens to declare Antifa a terrorist group

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In a tweet Saturday, President Donald Trump declared that “consideration is being given” to declaring an informal grouping of anti-fascist protesters, Antifa, a “major organization of terror.” This is despite the fact that no one has been killed by Antifa, while 50 people were murdered last year by neo-Nazi and white supremacist groups and individuals to whom Trump has expressed no such hostility.

Trump added the claim that such an action “would make it easier for police to do their job.” He was responding to a resolution introduced July 18 by two Republican senators, Ted Cruz of Texas and Bill Cassidy of Louisiana, which urges such a formal declaration. The bill cites protests such as blockades of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) facilities and the release on the internet of the personal information of ICE and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Agents.

On the House side, Representative Brian Fitzpatrick, a former FBI agent, sent a letter to Attorney General William Barr July 17 asking him to “initiate the necessary proceedings to designate Antifa a domestic terrorist organization.”

On July 23, while questioning FBI Director Christopher Wray at a Senate committee hearing, Cruz said, “I will be sending to you today a letter to the Department of Justice asking you to open a RICO investigation into Antifa.” RICO (racketeer influenced and corrupt organization) is the designation under federal law for the Mafia and other organized crime affiliates.

The FBI has never given the designation “domestic terrorist organization” to any group, including the Ku Klux Klan and other white supremacist and neo-Nazi formations. Instead, under the Patriot Act, actions are classified as “domestic terrorism” if they are crimes

dangerous to human life that are meant to intimidate the public or influence government policy. But there is no legal charge of “domestic terrorism.” It is an FBI internal classification for the purpose of investigation.

Since Antifa is a loose and fluid network, not an organization, designating it as “terrorist” would have the effect of pinning that label on many thousands of people who participate in anti-fascist protests, regardless of what they actually do or their political views. It would facilitate the building up of government databases on a much wider number of left-wing activists than the relatively small number who use the Antifa signboard.

As is the case with many of his tweets, Trump’s comments about Antifa flow directly from a broadcast on the Fox News cable network—in this case an interview with Laura Ingraham by right-wing activist Andy Ngo, who claims to have been assaulted by Antifa activists last month in Portland, Oregon. Friday’s interview with Ngo, who denounced Antifa as “anarchists and communists” who are “working toward a political revolution,” was followed by Trump’s tweet Saturday along the same lines.

According to figures compiled by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), all 50 killings by domestic extremists in 2018 “had a link to right-wing extremism,” including the murder of 11 people at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh. Far-right groups accounted for 73 percent of the 425 murders committed by political extremists over the last decade, according to the ADL.

Earlier this month, neo-Nazi James Alex Fields Jr. was sentenced to 419 years in prison for deliberately driving his car into a crowd of anti-fascist protesters in Charlottesville, Virginia, in 2017, killing 32-year-old Heather Heyer. This was the incident following which

Trump famously tweeted that there were “good people on both sides” of the confrontation between torch-wielding neo-Nazis and counter-demonstrators.



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