Neo-Nazi couple arrested in plot to attack Baltimore-area substations

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In a press conference on February 6, the US Justice Department announced that two neo-Nazis had been arrested on February 3 for conspiring to attack electrical substations located around Baltimore, Maryland.

Erek Barron, US Attorney for the District of Maryland, announced that a criminal complaint had been unsealed against 27-year-old Brandon Russell of Orlando, Florida, a former member of the Florida National Guard and the founder of the neo-Nazi Atomwaffen Division (AWD) terrorist group, and his girlfriend and fellow neo-Nazi, Sarah Beth Clendaniel, 34, of Catonsville, Maryland.

The AWD was founded by Russell in 2013. While the group's membership is believed to consist of only a few hundred members at most, under the watchful eye of the US intelligence agencies the group has continued to expand over the years, spreading from the United States to Europe and Canada. Members of the group have previously been convicted of murder, assault, intimidation, harassment and, in the case of Russell, unlawfully storing explosives.

According to the authorities, Russell and Clendaniel met while both were serving prison sentences. Both fascists were out on probation at the time of their arrest.

Russell was released from prison in August 2021 after serving a five-year sentence on explosive charges. At the time of his arrest, police discovered in his apartment neo-Nazi paraphernalia, a framed photograph of Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh and "the high explosive hexamethylene triperoxide diamine."

In 2016, Clendaniel was sentenced to nine years in prison after being convicted of robbing several convenience stores with a machete. In an interview with the *Washington Post*, Clendaniel's mother, Lanette Clendaniel, said that her daughter struggled with drug abuse for years and did not become involved with neo-Nazis until she was sent to prison.

"Her beliefs stem from the prison system," Lanette told the *Post*, "She didn't really get into that cr*p until she was in prison."

The alleged plot by the neo-Nazi couple against Baltimore-area substations is part of a wave of far-right activity targeting critical infrastructure in the United States. According to publicly available reports, there have been at least nine attacks on electrical substations within the last three months in the United States.

One of the most recent and damaging attacks occurred this past December in Moore County, North Carolina. In that attack, roughly 100,000 people lost power for nearly a week after the perpetrators, still unknown to this day, targeted two substations with high-powered rifles.

This past January, Oregon Public Broadcasting obtained an FBI memo warning that neo-Nazis were determined to attack electrical infrastructure within the US. In the memo, the FBI revealed that there had been at least 15 attacks on power substations in the Pacific Northwest since June 2022, more than the previous six years combined.

For decades, fascists, in documents and online manifestos, have preached targeting critical

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infrastructure as part of a plot to provoke a racial civil war. In 2017, a member of the AWD admitted to the government that the group had plans not only to attack electrical substations, but a nuclear power plant in Florida as well.

In Monday's criminal complaint, the government alleged that Russell and Clendaniel had been conspiring since at least June 2022 to attack electrical infrastructure in the US. Speaking on Monday, Assistant Attorney General for National Security Matthew Olsen said that "[d]riven by their ideology of racially motivated hatred," the defendants schemed to attack local power grid facilities.

US Attorney Erek Barron added that the attack was deliberately planned to take place when there would be increased strain on the electrical system. "This alleged planned attack threatened lives and would have left thousands of Marylanders in the cold and dark," he said.

According to the government, the substations the neo-Nazis were planning to attack were located in Norrisville, Reisterstown and Perry Hall.

Prosecutors claim they became aware of the plot after a government informant was recruited into the terrorist conspiracy last year by Russell and Clendaniel.

In charging documents, the government wrote that since at least June 2022, Russell, using the moniker "Homunculus" on an encrypted messaging platform, encouraged a "confidential human source," i.e., the government informant, to carry out terrorist attacks against critical infrastructure. Prosecutors claim Russell "encouraged" the informant, whom he met while in prison, to attack electrical substations, and provided "guidance on how to cause maximum damage."

The prosecutors alleged that Russell provided the informant with maps showing the locations of substations around the city of Baltimore and stressed that the attack should target the transformers, since the equipment is "custom made" and could take "a year to replace."

The government also claimed that in addition to a photo of Clendaniel wielding an assault rifle and wearing a swastika, it recovered a statement written by Clendaniel in which she referenced Adolf Hitler, the Unabomber (Ted Kaczynski) and Norwegian mass killer Anders Breivik. In the fascist manifesto, Clendaniel allegedly wrote, "I would sacrifice **everything** for my people to just have a chance for our cause to succeed."

The resurgence of fascist terrorism is an international phenomenon and takes place under conditions of a deepening crisis of the capitalist system across the globe. Under conditions of widening inequality, global inflation and the ongoing US-NATO war in Ukraine against Russia, bourgeois parties and intelligence agencies are encouraging and facilitating the growth of neo-Nazi and reactionary networks to be used against the working class.

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