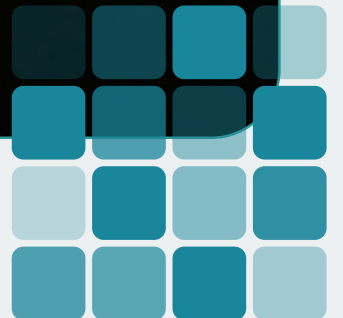


CHRISTCHURCH TERROR ATTACK, BRENTON TARRANT'S MANIFESTO AND THE NEW FACE OF TERRORISM



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CHRISTCHURCH TERROR ATTACK, BRENTON TARRANT'S MANIFESTO AND THE NEW FACE OF TERRORISM

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The terror attack carried out by Brenton Tarrant in New Zealand on March 15 has claimed the lives of 49 Muslims as of the time of writing at Al Noor Mosque and Linwood Avenue Mosque in Christchurch. Following the attack, New Zealand police also found two Improvised Explosive Device (IEDs) in a nearby vehicle and taken three men and a woman into custody which could result in the revelation of a bigger cell-type structure other than an individual terror attack by Tarrant.

Tarrant's manifesto uploaded online clearly shows that the attack is an extreme right-wing one with a quite explicit Islamophobic fervour. His manifesto and the way he carried out the attack remind the terror attack carried out by Andres Behring Breivik in Norway in 2011 and his "2083- A European Declaration of Independence". This piece will discuss, some key points from Tarrant's manifesto as well as how he used technology to follow the famous "propaganda by deed" strategy and what his attack tells us about different forms of terrorism and the link between them.

The terror attack in Christchurch, besides the unbearable tragedy, proved how the use of online realm is getting more and more central to the new face of terrorism regardless of its motivations. Since the 1990s, we saw a gradually increasing level of activity in this realm by extremist and/or terrorist groups from the Neo-Nazis to the KKK and from the YPG to the ISIS, the group which represented the climax of the cyber activity for years with a focus on producing propaganda materials and investing in the people who can contribute to those, producing up to one thousand propaganda materials a month when at the zenith of its strength before its military losses in Iraq and Syria. Tarrant seems to be aware of the multiplier effect of the online tools to spread his "cause" and to increase the psychological impact of his attack. He not only shared his manifesto online via his own Twitter account but also livestreamed the massacre he carried out via Facebook and 8chan. The video of the massacre, even though removed quite fast - which points to the importance of close state-private cooperation in the cyber realm - would probably be reached via many other websites and/or social media and messaging



shares as well as deep web circles, which, on the other hand, points to the impossibility of a perfect defense in the online realm against pro-extremist content. Even though Artificial Intelligence (AI) is getting more and more effective in terms of removing such content and banning the accounts sharing them, once something gets online, it is almost impossible to remove it for good. Unfortunately, this implies that the video and manifesto would keep inspiring like-minded extreme right-wing terrorists and Islamophobes and even help Tarrant to act as a “sources of inspiration”. Once he also mentioned his “investments” in

live only in the east side of the Bosphorus and otherwise they will be killed, driven from “their lands” (i.e. Europe), and they “are coming for Constantinople” to destroy all the minarets and mosques in the city and make it “Christian owned once more”. It gets even more interesting when he speaks of himself as not being sure about being Christian when considered together with this discourse. Regarding Turkey, he also states his irritation of seeing Turkey as a NATO ally and mentions the “need” to push the country to back to the “true position of a foreign, enemy force”. Related to this point, it should also be noted that he not only rejects

“One of the key takes from Tarrant’s discourse as well as the “messages” on his rifle is a common theme among many extreme right-wing groups, which is a strong anti-Turkish sentiment or Turcophobia goes hand in hand with Islamophobia which originates from historical traumas and humiliation.”

Bitconnect, we have a textbook picture of the new face of terrorism; cryptocurrencies, online propaganda materials and livestreamed attacks.

The background music of his video which is a marching anthem of the Serbian Chetniks during the Bosnian War praising Karadzic tells a lot about his “global” focus in his Islamophobic terrorism. Besides, keeping Breivik’s intellectual level and historical knowledge in mind partly thanks to his childhood at the Norwegian embassy premises in London, it is also interesting to see references to the siege of Vienna and John Hunyadi along with the word “Turcofagos” among the many lines written on the terrorist’s rifle, implying that he is familiar with the Medieval history and the Ottoman advances into Europe and see this as a disgrace that is not yet reversed to the fullest extent.

This last point is more visible in his manifesto where he has a separate section entitled “To Turks”. He states in this section that Turks can

Turkey’s NATO membership, but also, he defends a NATO without both Turkey and the US since he despises the US due to its “melting pot” which would make the institution a true “European army”. His opposition of the US is also fed by the “current nihilistic, hedonistic, individualistic” way of life in the West, for which he implicitly blames the US which he wishes to experience a civil war and subsequent Balkanization as a result of his attack and ensued discussions about the 2nd Amendment. (This is the reason why he chose firearms over “TATP filled rental van, household flour... a ballpeen hammer and a wooden shield” etc.). His ultimate goal with a civil war is to prevent the US from projecting its power globally and thus, “never again can such a situation as the US involvement in Kosovo ever occur”.

Tarrant starts his manifesto with a discussion on “birthrates”. According to him, since Europe is getting weaker and older due to low birthrates, if they cannot return to

“replacement levels”, Europe will “spiral into decay” even if all non-Europeans are deported.

One of the key takes from Tarrant's discourse as well as the “messages” on his rifle is a common theme among many extreme right-wing groups, which is a strong anti-Turkish sentiment or Turcophobia goes hand in hand with Islamophobia which originates from historical traumas and humiliation.

Another point which is quite important in Tarrant's manifesto is his reference to his own childhood as a “regular one, without any great issues”, a choice of words far from coincidental. Keeping Breivik's traumatic childhood in mind, Tarrant here, tries to go beyond the argument that terrorists commonly suffer from childhood issues, and thus claim himself to be conscious, psychologically normal, ordinary person who deliberately chose a path and defend it to the end, not a broken personality fighting for acceptance and dignity.

Regarding his “change” and how he made his decision about following a violent path, he refers to two key events; Stockholm attack in April, 2017 where Ebba Akkerlund, among others, lost her life as a traumatic turning point for Tarrant and the French elections of May, 2017 where according to him “internationalist, globalist, anti-White, ex-banker” won against “quasi-nationalist” candidate, thus, persuading him that a political solution is not possible to achieve his goals. Lastly, he talks about his own experience in France where “invaders” according to him were everywhere and “culture and identity” are “lost”.

Even though Tarrant claims he has no direct affiliation with any political group, he “donated to many nationalist groups and interacted with many more”, showing the significance of both online and offline person-to-person connections in terms of constructing a “group identity” and sense of belonging. Relatedly, he refers to the “reborn Knights Templar” as if their “blessing”



is providing a prestige and ideational upper ground that no other actor among extreme right-wing groups can provide. Along with the fact that he uploaded his manifesto on January, 21 and updated it on March, 14, the whole picture also underlines the significance of effective use of law-enforcement tools and surveillance measures once footprints of suspected people are directing towards extremism without violating privacy and the freedom of expression.

Even though he argues that he will be forgotten quickly following the attack, he assumed that the “aftershock” from the attack would cause a deep social and political change, which, so far, has proven quite an ambitious goal for any extreme right-wing terror attack. Nevertheless, this line of argumentation clearly shows his rationality and points to the fact that he is far from a mentally ill right-wing

in Christchurch three months before the attack. He admits that the attack is “by definition...a terrorist attack” even though he prefers calling it a “partisan action against an occupying force” in a country where he is not originally from and even more interestingly where its history is one of the showcases of how local communities can suffer at the hands of the colonizers.

Being a communist, anarchist and liberal in his life journey, in his manifesto he defines himself as an Ethno-nationalist Eco-fascist, inspired by Sir Oswald Mosley’s views most, and felt China is the “nation with the closest political and social values to” his values. He also directly make a reference to Breivik, who he calls Knight Justiciar Breivik, as his main source of inspiration, which explains a lot in terms of not only his way of thinking and operational tactics along with many parallels in Breivik’s and Tarrant’s writings. but also

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extremist but rather an extreme right-wing terrorist who carefully and rationally - even though unrealistically which is an euphoria and megalomania-driven error commonly made by many terrorists throughout history - calculated the limits of the impact he himself can make, the “aftershock” of the attack, his ultimate goal and how he can reach it as well as which actors would be the key targets for that end. In terms of targets, he made no clear distinction as long as the “enemy” is living in the lands of white Europeans. The argumentation behind his targeting of women and children can be found where he argues that “They are no innocents in an invasion”. Moreover, he also mentions a long preparation period of 2 years to carry out an attack until he decided to do so

even the structure of his own manifesto with many Q&As in it just like Breivik’s.

According to him, the rise of extreme-right wing ideas is not about “being brain-washed, corrupted or misled”, rather it is about white people in different parts of the world “finally removing their blindfolds” and realizing that “radicalization is the rational response to degeneration”. He also mentions a long list of possible targets from Sadiq Khan to local CEOs and local drug dealers and from German Chancellor Angela Merkel to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan who, in his words, is “the leader of one of the oldest enemies of our people and the leader of the largest Islamic group in Europe”.

Conclusion

Even though the text of Tarrant's manifesto is quite clearly a weak one both in terms of its intellectual quality and language, both the attack and the text reveal several key aspects of both the new face of terrorism and the vicious cycle of different forms of terrorism. Intensive use of social media and high definition visual material for propaganda purposes to multiply the impact of the attack, dissemination of reading material online and reference to cryptocurrencies (which might have also been used for "donations" he mentioned in his manifesto) stand out as key examples of how terrorism's tools are evolving in time. With respect to his focus on propaganda and the role of media in that regard can be found in the part where he argues that if he can survive, he can "spread his ideals by media coverage". Additionally, in his words, if he can survive, he would not plead guilty since he believes that he carried out a "partisan action against an occupying force" as a "lawful, uniformed combatant". Compared to the ones who killed the Czar Alexander II with a much lesser capability and means to disseminate their message, today's terrorists can disseminate their messages through different means and by using both visual and audio content in seconds to millions of people at almost no

cost. This requires more and more cooperation between states and private companies controlling a vast majority of the cyber ocean and pushes states to be fast and innovative in their race to be "one step ahead" of terrorists.

If only one lesson would be deduced from the attack, it should be the vicious cycle of terrorism. Different forms of terrorism would keep feeding into each other's discourse and motivating others to step up. Thus, from financial surveillance to signal intelligence (SIGINT), unless an unbiased approach is adopted against all forms of extremist and/or terrorist activity, while focusing on the fight against a particular form of extremism, other forms could easily find fertile grounds to be more and more active which would also damage the global fight against those groups primarily on target. Therefore, especially after the attack and since ISIS-linked accounts started to publish revenge posts already, how law-enforcement mechanisms as well as the international community and leading international organizations will approach the attack, from whether explicitly labelling it as a terror attack to showing solidarity with Muslims both globally and at the local level would be quite important to avoid further maintaining this vicious cycle.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



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