The Internet, Intelligence Agencies, and Neo-Fascism

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INTERFACE 6/2/20
“We live in capitalism. Its power seems inescapable. So did the divine right of kings. Any human power can be resisted and changed by human beings.”

- Ursula K. Le Guin

Speech at the National Book Awards, 19 Nov 2014
Who/what is fascist? What is fascism?
Classical Fascism

- Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*

Selections from his list of “mobilizing passions”:
- a sense of overwhelming crisis beyond the reach of any traditional solutions
- the primacy of the group
- the belief that one’s group is a victim
- dread of the group’s decline under the corrosive effects of individualistic liberalism, class conflict, and alien influences
- the need for closer integration of a purer community
- the right of the chosen people to dominate others... right being decided by the sole criterion of the group’s prowess within a Darwinian struggle
Where was fascism born?

- George L. Mosse, *The Fascist Revolution*

  Description of fascist aesthetics/rhetoric: Masculine, modern, youthful, violent, soldier-like, all-powerful leader. Emphasis on race purity, martyrdom, cultural traditions, and a mythologized past.

- “Birth of Fascism” 23 March 1919

  Speech by Mussolini in Piazza San Sepolcro of Milan. Attended by somewhere between 25-500 people, depending on which historian you ask.
Where was fascism born?

- **Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species***
  Published 24 November 1859.
  Social Darwinism arises 1870s
  The term eugenics is invented in 1883 by Francis Galton, Darwin’s half-cousin.

- **Louis Pasteur’s germ theory, 1860s.**

- **Social theory on the “masses,” late 1800s**

  Growing awareness and fear of the crowd as a challenge to the old, familiar social order following the military defeat of France in 1870, and violent social upheavals at the end of the Commune in 1871.

  **Gustave Le Bon**: Doctrine of mystification: orators, when addressing the crowd, should appeal to their “sentiments, and never to their reason.” Use of mythology, theatrical modes, powerful words.

- **George Sorel, *Réflexions sur la violence, 1906.***

  Believed that violence, by destroying materialism, utilitarianism, liberalism, and democracy, could save the world from barbarism and degeneration. Myth as a motivating force.
Over 100 years later, we still have fascists

- Can’t they take a hint and just give up the damn ghost already wtf
Fascist Spectacle – Persistence in the Era of Mass Politics

SA march in Berlin

German PEGIDA rally

Member of the Base – American neo-Nazi group

Charlottesville rally

Italian Blackshirts
Neo-Fascists + Mainstream Social Media

- Reddit

Former CEO Ellen Pao and #RedditRevolt, 2015. Came in response to the banning of 5 popular subreddits for violating site rules on harassment; reignited by firing of popular employee. 213,000 signed a petition demanding her resignation.

The usual suspects: r/incel → r/incels → r/braincel; r/theredpill; r/The_Donald...

- Tumblr

A hot mess

Lindsay Souvannarath, Halifax mass shooting plot, 2015.
Less Mainstream Platforms for Neo-Fascist Online Communities

- The Daily Stormer
- Stormfront
- 4chan
  /pol/ (short for politically incorrect) and /b/ ("random") being notable boards
- 8chan/8kun
  Originally created as a "free-speech-friendly" alternative to 4chan
  Announcements/manifestos for Christchurch, NZ shooting; Poway, CA synagogue shooting; El Paso shooting (all in 2019) posted here

- DDoS mitigation + Internet security (e.g. Cloudflare); domain name service registrars (e.g. BitMitigate); cloud infrastructure providers (e.g. Voxility)

- Encrypted channels

Fredrick Brennan, founder of 8chan
One thing that always amazes me about America is these crazy huge storms every time I'm here.
Dog-whistles

- Dog-whistle politics is political messaging employing coded language that appears to mean one thing to the general public at large while having a different, more specific resonance for a targeted subgroup.

Other references:

https://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Alt-right_glossary

https://www.adl.org/hate-symbols
Notable Dog-Whistles

Stuff you might know:
Pepe the frog, OK hand symbol

Stuff you probably don’t:
14/88: Reference to the 14 words of white supremacist David Lane, 88 being HH in the alphabet (aka Heil Hitler)
((( ))) i.e. triple parentheses: used to insinuate Jewish ancestry
12: AB (Aryan Brotherhood)
311: 11 → K three times
3%er: militia group, catchphrase signifying that one will take up arms for America
Blueish: placeholder for Jewish. Includes photo manipulation giving subject a bluer tint.
Who is responsible for content moderation?
Who/what are the most important targets?
How should action be taken?
Other things we should consider about fascism or neo-fascism?
The American Intelligence Community

- 16 agencies
- Coordinated by Office of the Director of National Intelligence
- Budget peak of ~$80 billion in 2010; budget of a humble ~$66.8 billion in 2015
- Can collect telephone data of U.S. civilians and foreigners; tap servers of major internet firms (PRISM); tap internet routers and fiber optics cables...
Random Points about Terrorism in America, 1990-2008

- **1995 Oklahoma City bombing**
  
  Perpetrated by separatist and white-supremacist Timothy McVeigh
  
  168 deaths, >600 wounded. The *deadliest* act of American domestic terrorism to date.
  
  FBI increases staff investigating domestic terrorism

- **9/11 – no one cares about terror groups that are not Islamist terror groups anymore**

- **The internet – easier dissemination + transnationalization of neo-fascist ideology + methods of violence**
  
  Monitored by a small team in the DHS, headed by Daryl Johnson

- **Election of President Barack Obama**
  
  Led to an explosion in white supremacist recruitment and radicalization
  
  Evidence by spike in membership on Stormfront, formation of anti-government militia groups, at least two assassination plots against Obama in the final months of the campaign
We need to design a balanced strategy for the long haul, to attack terrorists and prevent their ranks from swelling while at the same time protecting our country against future attacks. We have been forced to think about the way our government is organized... Congress needs dramatic change as well to strengthen oversight and focus accountability.
Protecting our country against future attacks, you say?

**Thomas Metzger (leader of White Aryan Resistance) on 9/11:**

“If an Aryan wants an example of ‘Victory or Valhalla,’ look no further.”

**Victor Gerhard (Vanguard News Network):**

“We should be blowing up NYC and DC, not waiting for a bunch of camel Jockeys to do it for us.”
The Trouble With Words

- Immediate backlash from anti-government groups, the far-right, and the Republican party over the term “right-wing extremism” and description of possible radicalization of veterans

John Boehner, then minority leader of the House: the term is used “to describe American citizens who disagree with the direction Washington Democrats are taking our nation.”

Johnson is fired, right-wing extremism unit dismantled, Napolitano forced to publicly apologize to veterans.
Fun with the FBI

- “We investigate violence, not ideology”

  James Comey on 2015 Dylann Roof shooting

  “Terrorism is more of a political act... [and] based on what I know [...] I don’t see [the Charleston shooting] as a political act.”

- FBI Domestic Terrorism-Hate Crimes Fusion Cell established 2019

At least 7 mass shootings/white supremacist attacks thwarted in the two weeks following El Paso shooting

- 1/2020: Arrests 7 members of the Base

  Intel on the Base gathered with an undercover agent, recordings from a bugged apartment

- Emphasis on community outreach + wiretaps

- FBI Director Christopher Wray, 5 Feb 2020 House Oversight hearing

  The agency has “elevated to the top-level priority racially motivated violent extremism, so it’s on the same footing in terms of our national threat banding as ISIS and homegrown violent extremism.”

Justin Herdman, top federal prosecutor in northern Ohio, lecturing local African American pastors on the threat of gunmen targeting their congregations.
Fun with the DHS

- 2009-2019: Almost nothing
- 9/2019: Releases “Strategic Framework for Countering Terrorism and Targeted Violence”

Under administration of acting secretary Kevin McAleenan. As of 6/2020, the DHS is headed by acting secretary Chad Wolf

Describes in detail the threat of violent white supremacists. Goals include improved data collection on patterns of violence esp. wrt hate crimes, improve information sharing, new threat evaluation and reporting program (NTER)

Issues of budget and personnel cuts will be an obstacle to achieving the goals it sets out

A page from the DHS report. Why was this necessary?
Law Enforcement Ties to Neo-Fascism

- White supremacist infiltration of law enforcement
- Militarization of local police forces and other groups, such as ICE
- Facebook groups of police officers posting violent and hateful memes
- Pattern of a lack of repercussions for police officers who exhibit violent/racist behavior, commit crimes, and lie


https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/emilyhoerner/police-facebook-racist-violent-posts-comments-philadelphia
Law Enforcement, Surveillance, and Neo-Fascism

- Clearview AI Facial Recognition
- NYPD + DAS (partnership with Microsoft)

https://www.huffpost.com/entry/clearview-ai-facial-recognition-alt-right_n_5e7d028bc5b6cb08a92a5c48
What ever shall we do?

- **Neo-fascism in police forces**
  - instituting and enforcing civilian review boards + community meetings on these issues
  - a court ruling on more expansive enforcement of the Brady doctrine
    https://law.lclark.edu/live/files/28080-lcb231article2johnsonpdf
  - pressure on local offices of budget and management

- **What should be put under surveillance?**
  - Seattle and California’s Oakland, Berkeley, Davis, and SF have banned municipal police from deploying new surveillance methods w/o approval from local government / members of the community. What are some guiding principles?