

# The Dawn of 21st Century American Paramilitarism

By **Ami du Radical** - June 23, 2017



***“ALL I HAVE TO DO IS SNAP MY FINGERS,” HE ALLEGEDLY WARNED ONE PROTESTER, “AND THE COPS WILL ARREST YOU.” THE OFFICERS THANKED THE MILITIA FOR THEIR ASSISTANCE AFTERWARD.”***

We are on the cusp of a dangerous shift in modern American society.

A new threat is beginning to take shape on the horizon. Human perception being what it is, we cannot be certain of our future, no matter how many historical parallels we use as yardsticks. But if the omens we have witnessed are to be believed, the presidency of Donald Trump will mark the beginning of what could tentatively be called “political gang warfare.”

The events of June have reframed the ongoing struggle between antifascism and fascism, as it exists in modern America. While this month has produced the largest gatherings of American antifascists in recent memory, we have also glimpsed the face of a deadly enemy which has gradually incubated within the temperamental rabble of the alt-right. In addition to the violence which has been unleashed by a resurgence of reactionary politics, the inevitable collusion between police and fascists has come to fruition before our very eyes. And now, a botched assassination attempt has handed the Trump administration a cheap means by which to both demonize leftists and, by contrast, present itself as a bastion of peace, while we are targeted by police and rightist thugs alike.

If we are careless in the near future, if we do not appreciate the gravity of our situation, if we disregard the warning signs, we may not recognize this new threat until it is knocking at our doors: domestic, far-right paramilitarism.

This essay will not attempt, nor could it possibly succeed at trying, to put forward a rubric for how best to defend our movement. No single document or person could account for every variable, nor speak for every leftist individual or community. Rather, this article is delivered as a warning, a sober analysis of what might lie ahead, and the dangers we face as the targets of state-sanctioned vigilante violence.

## **FROM MEMES TO IEDs: A MATURING FASCIST MOVEMENT**

In recent months, we have repeatedly heard a long litany of crimes committed in the name of state dominance and ur-fascism. But it deserves yet another repetition, so that no ambiguity clouds our judgement of the threats facing us.

In America alone, and in this year alone, hate crimes have spiked immensely. The month after the election, the SPLC Hatewatch catalogued 1,094 cases of prejudicially-motivated attacks, all but 26 of which were attributed to rightists and Trump supporters [1]. Urban populations are seeing this trend continue, with some areas suffering 40% or higher increases in the frequency of hate crimes [2]. White supremacist terrorism has been emboldened, and the perpetrators of that violence behave with newfound confidence. Alex Scarsella opened fire on a group of BLM protesters, inspired by his time spent on 4chan's most toxic boards [3]. Dylann Roof killed nine churchgoers and left behind a manifesto born from Stormfront radicalization. Two alt-right followers attempted to murder an IWW member at the University of Washington [4]. James Harris Jackson boarded a bus to Manhattan with the intent to commit a ritualistic anti-black slaying. Sean Urbanski similarly targeted Richard Collins, with equal hatred and equal disregard for the visibility of his crime. The Portland murders have burned into our minds the image of a dead-eyed fascist wrapped in a Bennington flag.

This list is incomplete. There is not enough space in this text for the ever-lengthening list of vandalism, arsons, shootings, and bomb threats directed at immigrants, Jews, Muslims, and the LGBTQ+ community. Taken as a whole, these events are an atlas of the growing presence of flagrant, violent, fascistic terrorism in America. They reveal the extent of the grudges still harbored in this

allegedly progressive society.

Through it all, we have looked on as the alt-right slowly metabolized the most harmful, hateful, and corrosive elements of reactionary ideology. What began with the loathsome vermin of Gamergate has now incorporated white nationalists, unashamed fascists, and brazen neo-nazis. The alt-right has adopted the Nazi flag, the rhetoric of ethnic cleansing, and clumsily attempted to fashion itself into a fighting force with cheap costumes and a layman's weaponry. They have made folkloric heroes of degenerate goons like Kyle Chapman, and invented formalistic clubs like the Proud Boys, to bedeck themselves in the symbolism of authority and supremacy.

June has become a time of reckoning not just for the rapidly-evolving left, but for the right as well. The chaff is being winnowed away, as the fascists search for a uniform identity to anchor their as-yet directionless movement.

We were given a humorous peek at the result of this abrasive factionalism when a lone, "pepe" variety alt-right goon was accosted by his fellow rightists, during the laughingstock that was the Sam Houston rally in Texas [5]. Draped in a Black Sun flag, he wore out his welcome with the older crowd who didn't want his jabbering internet lingo being associated with their "proud Confederate" image. Violently ejected from their midst, his juvenile plea is now immortalized by the words "These are good memes!"

Amusing, certainly. But viewed in the broader context of the spread of the alt-right in America, it demonstrates that the far-right is trying to formulate a more deliberate movement. With the inclusion of hardcore fascists came their thirst for domination, and the mass elitism upon which their ideology is based. The giggling, meme-obsessed channer is being tamed under the bootheel of his unironic, impatient older brother. Soon enough, the alt-right's junior members will learn there is no place for deviants in the Vaterland.

We arrive at this point with the knowledge that neo-nazi groups connected with the alt-right have reintroduced the threat of improvised explosive attacks. In Florida, a member of the Atomwaffen was discovered with the crude components of a dirty bomb [6]. There is little chance that he is the only one of his kind active in America today.

Most immediately troubling, however, has been the burgeoning presence of right-wing militias at Trumpist rallies. The Oath Keeper and III% militias, part of a far-right extremist movement which has

grown steadily since the Obama election [7], have incrementally added their voice to the fascist right and appeared at more demonstrations as the year has progressed [8]. Despite framing themselves as “anti-government” organizations, these militias push the same authoritarian and xenophobic propaganda as the very government which permits their continued existence. Let’s not forget the zeal with which armed leftist groups are attacked by the state, and the soft hand applied to their rightist counterparts [9].

But the hoi polloi of the alt-right are unenthusiastic about the inclusion of these “patriot” militias in their movement. On AltRight.com, contributor Vincent Law published an accusation of betrayal against the Oath Keepers, who grabbed the aforementioned meme enthusiast while he was being cast out of the Sam Houston rally [10]. This story, as well as other disagreements between the alt-right and the militia movement, have brought out the opportunistic and self-serving tendencies of fascist ideology. The Daily Stormer was equally outraged. Brad Griffin of Occidental Dissent was displeased with the Oath Keeper militia’s posturing as a racially inclusive group (though in truth, the Oath Keepers and III% militias have a deep vein of racism in their behavior and ideology)[11][12]. The Oath Keepers even attempted to soothe these inflamed tempers, claiming the assailant was not one of their own.

It fell to accused rapist and accomplished bootlicker Augustus Sol Invictus to try to heal this wound. He took to Facebook to urge peace between the alt-right horde and the militia members, claiming that he has successfully worked with them in the past, and has seen their capacity for cooperation with groups like Identity Evropa. “I make it a point,” he declared, “to speak with all sides and to remind everyone that we have a common purpose and a common enemy.”

There is no question that the plentiful satellite movements and organizations which have merely orbited around the Trump presidency are now assimilating into something more threatening and doomful. Any semblance of “irony” in their adoption of fascist imagery, rhetoric, and ideology has evaporated. They are searching for an official identity and aesthetic.

The bottom line is that the fanatic core of American fascism will undoubtedly see more value in a well-trained militia than a mob of recalcitrant, immature channers. Even Baked Alaska chose an Oath Keeper as his personal bodyguard. As such, we can predict that efforts will be taken to incorporate the militia movement into the alt-right as cleanly as possible. Those hangers-on deemed unfit will be expelled or relegated to the role of henchmen, while their knuckle-dragging warlords determine who has the right to rule the mob. Such is the backbiting nature of fascism that this rivalry will remain

even if these two bellicose factions feign a mutual respect for one another to keep up appearances; further infighting is a certainty. But in the meantime, the alt-right's leadership and the militiamen will likely maintain order by beating their minions over the head with the "common purpose" of a crusade in the name of the state, the status quo, and their moribund God-Emperor.

## POLICE AND THE NEW SQUADRISTI

During the June 10th rallies, the police presence had made a noticeable change in their behavior towards protests. In multiple cities, officers arrived in imposing columnar formations and put their militarism on full display. In some scenes captured by journalists during demonstrations, the police look indistinguishable from a military parade.

This manner of policing is meant to maintain order by the threat of overwhelming force. In the modern surveillance state, we are stalked online, watched in public at all times, and routinely have our civil rights violated in order to be monitored more thoroughly. This omnipresent and iron-fisted attitude has been epitomized by the militarized police officer, scores of whom roll through our rallies on the backs of armored vehicles armed to the teeth, alerting us to the measures they'll take to quell our resistance. A similar column of riot police appeared at the Evergreen campus during the Patriot Prayer rally on the 15th. These formations are not intended to "keep the peace" between two demonstrations — how many of us have even seen an officer facing away from an antifascist front line? Rather, they are a silent exhibition of the force which could be brought down on us if we overstepped the boundaries of "acceptable" aggression.

But the most chilling report came from Portland, where the police crossed a line of their own. On June 4th, while demonstrating against the "Free Speech Rally" in Oregon, an antifascist was accosted by the "private security" militia and told to leave. A chase ensued, and another militia member caught the man, throwing him to the ground. In photographs captured by individuals on the scene, an Oath Keeper takes part in detaining the arrestee and even uses the officers' ziptie handcuffs [13]. This individual is currently under investigation, but at the time of the incident, the police accepted his assistance without even pausing. The Oath Keeper in question, one Tusitala "Tiny" Toese of Vancouver, says the officers asked for his assistance [14].

This was an eventuality. We have already witnessed the numerous means by which the police have coordinated with fascists across the country. At Berkeley, the cops employed what has now become

a standard method of tilting street conflict in favor of the far-right, disarming the antifascists while ignoring the well-armed nationalists [15]. They were in contact with the alt-right organizers beforehand, made sure they had a secure space in which to organize, and even shook hands with the fascists themselves [16]. Since then, the police have made more frequent and more deliberate efforts to protect fascists during confrontations. In Pikeville, they formed a blockade to allow a safe escape for Matthew Heimbach's slack-jawed lackeys, but also passed an emergency law to prevent antifascists from concealing their identities [17]. In Portland, officers suddenly unloaded "less-lethal" munitions into the antifascist ranks to facilitate an egress for the alt-right. And now, they have made a Faustian pact by accepting the collaboration of militia members.

Even Tiny himself has bragged about the level to which police and militia members are intertwined. "All I have to do is snap my fingers," he allegedly warned one protester, "and the cops will arrest you." The officers thanked the militia for their assistance afterward.

Irrespective of whether or not Tiny is charged with some minor crime after the investigation, the police did nothing to halt his interference with their arrest. They saw another person in body-armor opposing black-clad anarchists, and instinctively accepted him as one of their own because he wears the same trappings of military authority they do. Militarization hasn't just given the police a material edge in combat with its citizens, it has also sensitized them to the potential for encouraging paramilitary activity. This is the payoff from those "counterinsurgency" seminars given to warrior-cops like those in the Denver Police Department, courtesy of Sebastian Gorka [18]. This is what the working class reaps from Obama administration recklessly hawking surplus military gear to local law enforcement. This how the US responds to civic turmoil in other nations as part of destabilization campaigns, aligning themselves with local right-wing forces to supplement and preserve their standing forces.

This is also major trend in the development of a fascist state. CrimethInc outlined the natural, almost gravitational way in which police in fascist regimes first learn to identify with right-wing vigilantes, then to condone their violence, and finally, to **directly collaborate with them**:

*"The events in Portland reflect a classic model we have already seen police and fascists employ in Berkeley. Police disarm and disempower demonstrators so fascists can attack them with impunity. In the aftermath of the clashes that took place in Berkeley on April 15, police carried out a series of raids in the Bay Area utilizing intelligence that had been provided to them by far-right internet trolls. This two-pronged assault enables reactionaries embedded in the state to disavow the elements of their agenda that are perceived as too*

*extreme, while utilizing a variety of tactics to crush attempts at self-determination and self-defense.”*  
*CrimethInc, “The Two Faces of Fascism” [19]*

More dire measures have been taken, as well. At multiple rallies throughout the year, police have arrested journalists, confiscated their equipment, and threatened them with severe carceral punishments [20]. By silencing and blinding independent journalists, the police are preventing any narrative but their own from being disseminated.

Make no mistake: when the police fired on our comrades in Portland, they were fully aware that a member of the fascist movement they were defending had recently slit the throats of three people in the name of white supremacy.

A hardline stance is being utilized, and thereby made more acceptable to the police and the public. Anarchists are becoming a caricature in political cartoons. Meanwhile, antifascists will be under increased pressure as more aggressive tactics and more powerful weaponry are added to the arsenal of the warrior-cop. And just as the police ignore or condone the unparalleled violence of the alt-right devils who have sometimes succeeded in their efforts to kill us, the state apparatus will ignore or condone the brutality of the police. Though the right has engaged in a verifiable pattern of targeted destruction, it is fears of leftist terrorism that will be stoked and used as justification for our repression, our pain, and our deaths.

## **“THE HINCKLEY EFFECT” AND AMERICAN POLITICAL VIOLENCE**

On March 30th, 1981, President Ronald Reagan was shot by would-be assassin John Hinckley. In the aftermath, the recovering president saw his approval rating jump [21]. He gained majority support from both sides of the aisle, and in 1981 he pushed forward with his controversial economic plan through a coalition of bipartisan support [22]. Put bluntly, nobody wanted to be the guy who votes against an assassination survivor. At the hospital where he was treated, Reagan jokingly told the doctors, “I hope you’re Republicans.” The attending surgeon, Dr. Joseph Giordano, a liberal Democrat, replied, “Today, we’re all Republicans.”

The shooting in Alexandria has produced this same platitude, by which the true nature of political

violence in America is revealed. As articulated by the Black Rose Anarchist Federation in their most recent article, the state has a unique relationship to the concept of violence:

“Historically, the vilification of the left as a violent threat is accompanied by increased state repression and vigilante violence against leftists during moments when state and capitalist hegemony is weakening. In other words, people are increasingly losing faith in the state and capitalist institutions and looking to leftist alternatives such as socialism and anarchism... The violence of the state, which is exponentially greater than the violence of any lone-wolf shooter, is obscured only through the heaviest of blinders. One can support violent settler colonization, imperialism, and state repression and still, without a hint of irony, say “violence of any kind is unacceptable in our society.” This is possible because the term “violence” as it is used in the wider U.S. political discourse skips over the violence of the powerful and only refers to violence that is directed up the social hierarchy. The far greater violence that constantly waged downward on the social hierarchy escapes scrutiny or even mention.” – BRRN, “The ‘Left-Wing Terrorism’ Narrative Doesn’t Understand Violence [23]

The ammunition provided by the attempted assassination of Representative Scalise has already been used to good effect. A recent attack ad from Georgia, aimed at Democrat Jon Ossoff, attempted to link the Democratic party to domestic terrorism: “The unhinged left is endorsing and applauding shooting Republicans,” warns the narrator [24]. “When will it stop? It won’t, if Jon Ossoff wins on Tuesday.”

But not only does the government obfuscate the meaning of the word “violence” by this narrative, it also congeals the supposedly bipartisan political landscape into a single bastion of American patriotism and authority. The aristocracy has rushed to defend itself as a unified entity, and in so doing, admitted that regardless of their party affiliation, their class is fundamentally divorced from the worker. Our deaths are never treated with such unanimous grief and solidarity, unless it is politically convenient to mourn “American lives,” and thereby subsume our lives into their national identity.

Yet this is the same government which hasn’t lifted a finger to halt the outrageous prison sentences faced by the J20 protesters, outright refuses to provide clean drinking water for the people, allows workers to be endlessly starved of financial security, and will go no further than “reform measures” to end the never-ending parade of citizen executions at the hands of police. There is the same president who personally encouraged violence at his own rallies, promising to pay the legal fees of his deputized militants. When he issued a paltry statement regarding the murders in Portland, Trump



neglected to address the fact that the killer was one of his most ardent supporters [25]. Steve Bannon, Rasputin of the American fascist movement, sits in Trump's cabinet, as flagrantly anti-Islamic and familiar with white nationalists as any alt-right cut-throat [26].

Meanwhile, the New Jersey Office of Homeland Security has listed antifascists as "domestic terrorists." [27]

This acceptance of the underpinnings of fascism, and simultaneous vilification of antifascists, are the most dangerous element of the current government. Without a barrier of political influence between the alt-right, their militia frenemies, and official state representatives, there is now a quiet riptide of paramilitarism lurking just below our feet. The aristocracy has proven itself to be both unwilling and incapable of differentiating between, let alone combating, the actual sources of violence and murder in America. More to the point, not even Bernie Sanders, the so-called "leftist" in Washington, would dare to voice support for antifascists. He knows as well as Trump that his job depends on preserving the state above all else.

This nation is ripe with opportunities for far-right terrorism to become a semi-official means of popular control. Certain members of the ruling class have made their allegiance far plainer to see. During the "March Against Sharia," Georgia Senator Michael Williams posed for a photo-op with the Oath Keeper militia. Some of them displayed the the "ironic" hand-sign now synonymous with the alt-right and white supremacy.



## WE BEAT THEM BEFORE, WE'LL BEAT THEM AGAIN

To reiterate: this essay cannot offer long-term solutions to the antifascist or anarchist movement. One thing we know for certain is that we will never be afforded the same privilege of self-defense that is extended to the right-wing.

We are regarded as a threat to the government, whereas the militias are a parallel organization to the police. Ergo, the openly carried weapon of a leftist would be grounds for terrorism charges, while the militant rightist can hang a rifle around their neck in an obvious display of vigilantism. We do not have the luxury of draping ourselves in hyperbolic patriotism to disguise a murderous subtext.

These developments are a dire warning for anarchists and antifascists. There is no ambiguity about what message is transmitted by the open displays of the militiaman's weapon. We understandably guffaw when confronted with images of the star-spangled Spartans puffing themselves up with

mimicked symbols of authority. But the militias represent a different threat: they wear their rifles as an lethal ultimatum, and a symbol of authority. They have already made a dangerous evolution by directly assisting the police, and the state has now blessed these vigilantes with a small loan of its monopolized violence. The legitimacy of Oath Keepers' use of force has been given an ever-so-slight nod of approval, encouraging this behavior in the future.

However, the protests of June should also inspire us, and give us hope. During these rallies, we saw not only the militias' strengths, but our own. The fact that fascists have had to rely on a traveling circus of mercenaries, while leftists can easily outnumber these marauders through local support across the nation, is proof that a larger portion of the people has found their ally in the black bloc antifascist. As such, we outnumbered the fascists by double digits in some cities, and shut down the anti-Muslim march in Texas before it even began.

This is our strength. The local community is our supply of cover when we bloc up, our source of defense when we are in sudden need of allies, our voice when revolutionary media and local journalists can chronicle our struggles instantaneously through social media. We have the upper hand in the grassroots battle, and how could it be otherwise? The right can pad their numbers to a certain extent through tokenism, but their supremacist and chauvinistic platforms alienate them from most of the population.

Leftists, on the other hand, have shown flexibility, rapid mobilization, materially inclusive behavior, and wholehearted dedication to their causes, even in the face of state repression and bloodthirsty freaks. At our best, we can fundamentally change the landscape of a neighborhood into a bulwark of liberty and self-determinism, if only for an hour or two. We will probably never see the kind of block-by-block sovereignty of the Spanish Civil War, because the urban landscape has been fundamentally altered by technological advancements. The state infects every minute of our lives, surveils us endlessly, and has scrambled what looks like an early response to a civil uprising. We cannot simply occupy vacant lots and wait for the inevitable police kettle.

What can be done remains to be seen. But clearly, as the political atmosphere deteriorates around them, leftists of all description have developed the crude tools to defend their autonomy, organize in silence, and form meaningful, symbiotic relationships between radical organizations. Our diversity is our strength. But as we work together to build our defenses, we must be ever-vigilant, always looking over our comrades' shoulders.

The enemy is gathering on the horizon, and a miscalculation on our part might be fatal. Next year, we might be facing thick-skulled bullies in spandex, or genuine right-wing death squads. This is a time, not for cowardice or inaction, but for careful consideration of each firm step, with a clear knowledge of what is at stake: people are dying.

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**About the author:**

**Ami du Radical**

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