

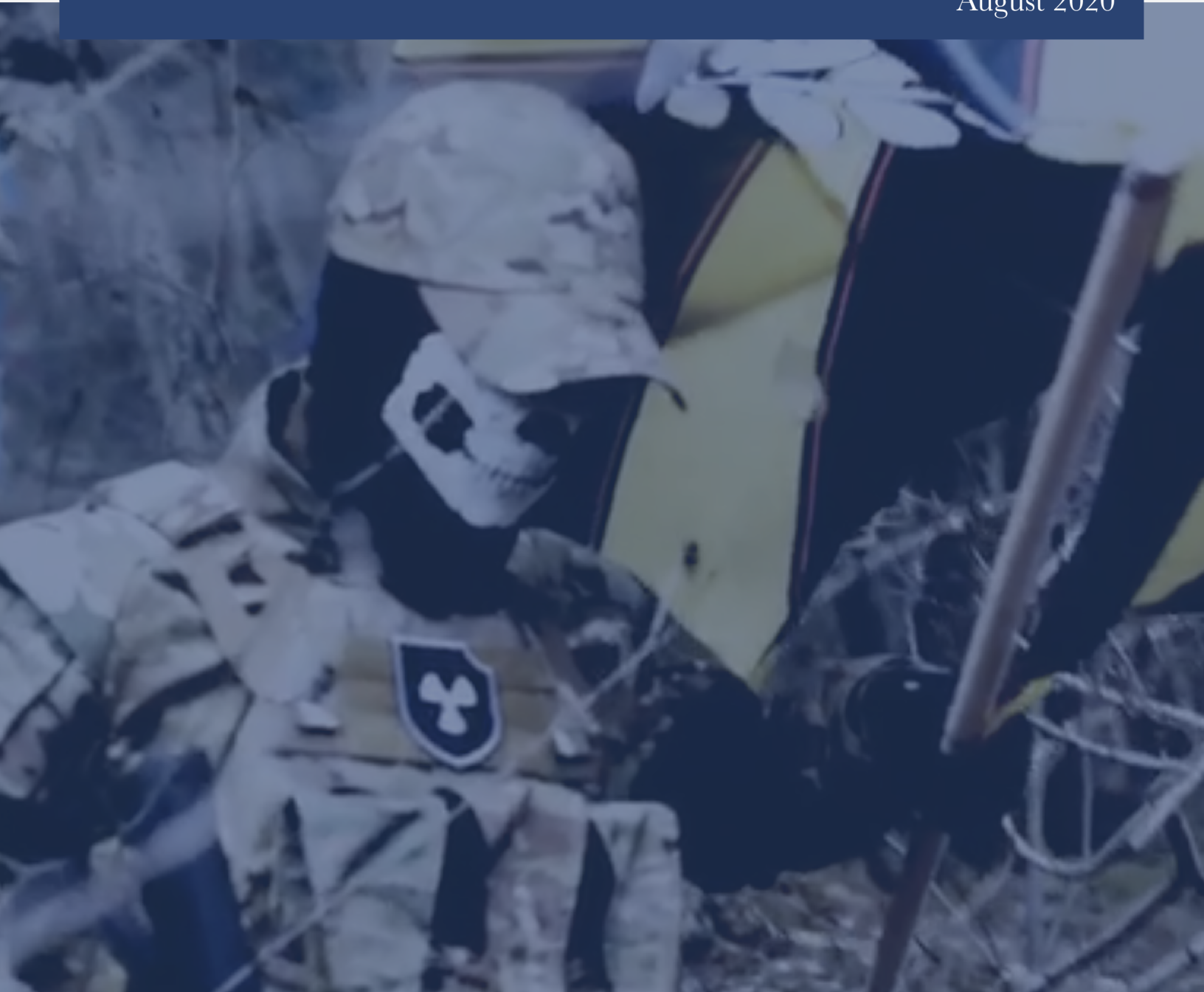
THE SOUFAN CENTER

SPECIAL REPORT:

THE ATOMWAFFEN DIVISION:

The Evolution of the White Supremacy Threat

August 2020



The Soufan Center's Work on White Supremacy

Since early 2017, The Soufan Center has documented the growth of a global network of white supremacist extremists that stretches across North America, Europe and Australia. The Soufan Center's September 2019 research paper 'White Supremacy Extremism: The Transnational Rise of the Violent White Supremacist Movement,' focused on a range of white supremacy extremist groups with global reach, including the Atomwaffen Division (AWD). In April 2020, the Soufan Center published new research, including analysis and recommendations, following the designation of The Russian Imperial Movement — the first white supremacist group ever sanctioned in the United States.

THE ATOMWAFFEN DIVISION

The Evolution of the White Supremacy Threat

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AUGUST 2020

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Cover photo: *Screen grab from Atomwaffen Division Galizien video titled 'Grey Zone'*

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADL	Anti-Defamation League
AWD	The Atomwaffen Division
AWD-D	Atomwaffen Division Deutschland (Germany)
DoS	United States Department of State
EO	Executive Order
HMTD	Hexamethylene triperoxide diamine
INA	Immigration and Nationality Act
ISIS	The Islamic State
FTO	Foreign Terrorist Organization
FKD	The Feuerkrieg Division
RIM	Russian Imperial Movement
SKD	The Sonnenkrieg Division
TSC	The Soufan Center
USG	United States Government
WSE	White Supremacy Extremism

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KEY FINDINGS

- The Atomwaffen Division (AWD) is a dangerous white supremacy extremist group that taps into explicit and even tacit acceptance of racist views and encourages violence to intimidate minority populations in pursuit of its goal of destabilizing society to instigate a race war.
- While AWD has roots in the United States, the group has an expanding international footprint, with established links and affiliates in the United Kingdom, Germany, Russia, Ukraine, and the Baltic States, making its reach and potential to influence and plan violence global in nature.
- Ukraine continues to be a critical node in the transnational white supremacy extremism network. Specifically, white supremacist organizations and individuals see the conflict in eastern Ukraine as a battlefield laboratory where they travel to gain actual combat experience—something many seek to bring back to their countries. The announcement of a potential AWD affiliate or inspired group in Ukraine presents a dangerous avenue for AWD members from around the world who wish to travel, train, and gain combat experience.
- The U.S. government should consider levying sanctions against AWD since it meets the legal criteria for designation as a Foreign Terrorist Organization; it has foreign presence and has carried out terrorist activity that represents a threat to U.S. national security interests.
- While the U.S. Government may find it challenging to designate AWD because of its domestic presence, it will be crucial to consider other legal options to criminalize the activities of the organization to the fullest extent of the law. One consideration could be updating the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), section 219, which addresses the criteria for designating an organization as a terrorist group. Amending the criteria with an eye towards providing more flexibility for the designation of groups that have both a foreign and domestic presence could close the gap that allows for groups like AWD to remain undesignated.
- AWD's message has resonated with former and active-duty military members, including veterans from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, making the group particularly dangerous given the tactical expertise and combat experience of some of its members.
- Similar to the so-called Islamic State, AWD has built a globally identifiable brand, which is capable of seducing violent white supremacists and aspiring neo-Nazis from around the globe, and spurring lone wolves to action by providing inspiration.

INTRODUCTION

The Atomwaffen Division (AWD) is a dangerous neo-Nazi extremist network with a rapidly growing international footprint. While AWD has roots in the United States and became notorious as a violent entity following its actions during the Unite the Right Rally in Charlottesville, VA in 2017, the group has since established links and affiliates across Europe, including in the United Kingdom, Germany, Russia, Ukraine, and the Baltic States, making its reach and potential to influence and plan violence global in nature. The group has proven its capability to be lethal, as its members have been linked to at least five murders in the United States, and has hosted paramilitary training camps for its members, all while spreading hateful propaganda on and offline to incite a race war. AWD members and leaders in the United States are known to have communicated with AWD cells abroad. Conor Climo – who plotted a bomb attack in Las Vegas – is an individual known to have been in communication with foreign AWD cells. And the added element of rising racial tensions emanating from the global COVID-19 pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement have created an environment ripe for AWD’s accelerationist ideology and desire for a white ethno-state to thrive.

On July 26, 2020 an announcement on Telegram claimed that the remaining leadership of AWD has founded and is leading a rebranded group known as the ‘National Socialist Order’ (NSO). Of note, NSO’s announcement praised Adolf Hitler, emphasized the importance of establishing an Aryan state, and called on its members to ensure the supremacy of the white race ‘by any means necessary.’ Before that, on March 14, 2020, James Mason, AWD’s de facto chief ideologue, declared again, that the group had dissolved. While the name of the group may change, evidence abounds that AWD’s global network persists in communicating and plotting,

including with some of the same leaders and members.¹ Name-changing to avoid tracking and punishment by authorities is a common tactic of both White Supremacy Extremism (WSE) movements and Salafi-Jihadist groups, including al-Qaeda.² AWD requires more scrutiny because of its growing global reach, ability to plan and execute violence, and, much like the broader WSE movement, AWD's leaderless structure and ability to adapt, under new names and with different branding make it easy for AWD to deflect attention and regroup, all while using the same underlying tactics. AWD's chameleon-like capability can confuse and disincentivize authorities to track its members down, even as the group grows its international presence. Additionally, because of the predominantly domestic nature of the group in the United States, AWD has been able to skirt the fullest extent of U.S. law, as U.S. criminal penalties surrounding domestic terrorism are largely weak and AWD's growing presence abroad is not yet considered mature enough to be sanctioned as a foreign terrorist group. The inability of U.S. legal authorities to apply the strongest penalties to this group should raise serious questions about how current legal frameworks on terrorism can be adapted to hold hybrid groups like AWD accountable for their violence.

But 2020 has proven to be a difficult year for AWD. In February, U.S. law enforcement arrested several alleged members of the group. A month later, in early March, an article by *Politico* noted that the U.S. Department of State (DoS) could be on the brink of designating the first violent white supremacist group – and AWD was considered the leading candidate. Soon after, in March, AWD announced its dissolution and the Russian Imperial Movement (RIM) was designated by DoS.³⁴ The emergence of AWD chapters in Europe shows that despite the arrest of high-profile figures in the United States, AWD's violent ideology remains attractive and requires a robust legal response that addresses its international nature. One such response includes terrorist sanctions, especially given the proliferation of AWD cells in several countries and its proven ability to organize and direct violence. More broadly, the existence of AWD and groups like it challenges U.S. legal frameworks on terrorism, as AWD does not fit neatly into the definition of a domestic or international terrorist group, which begs the question of how such frameworks may need to be adapted to address both current and future terrorist threats.

FORMATION, STRUCTURE, AND LEADERSHIP OF AWD

AWD was founded in 2015 by Brandon Clint Russell (the word ‘Atomwaffen’ is German for atomic weapons). The group emerged from a neo-Nazi online message board called Iron March, created in 2011 by Alisher Mukhitdinov, a.k.a. Alexander Slavros, an Uzbek national living in Moscow. Initially, AWD was organized almost wholly online, largely through the video game-oriented Discord platform.⁵ AWD represents the apotheosis of white supremacy extremism in the digital age, with the aspiration to build a global presence with a brand that is recognizable to potential recruits worldwide.

AWD operates as a cellular-based organization with anywhere from several dozen to 80 members, possibly more, located across the United States.⁶ Its strategy resembles that outlined by the *Management of Savagery*, the strategy by which al-Qaeda expanded across the globe and which ISIS used to build a caliphate. According to a complaint filed in the District Court of Nevada in August 2019, AWD uses a ‘leaderless resistance’ strategy, in which small cells or ‘lone wolves’ further the organization’s goals through violence.⁷ AWD’s various chapters are known to have issued threats and attempted to intimidate people and communities they oppose, with several AWD members and leaders having been charged with terrorism-related offenses in a number of countries (discussed in more detail on page 19).

In addition to Russell, the founder of AWD, other individuals have emerged as AWD leaders. John Cameron Denton (nicknamed ‘Rape’) of Montgomery, Texas, made a series of bomb threats designed to provoke a major law enforcement response, called ‘swatting,’ before he was

arrested in February 2020. Prior to this arrest, Denton was the most high-profile AWD member in Texas.⁸ Michael Lloyd Hubsby led the Las Vegas cell, organizing AWD's Nevada Hate Camp⁹, before flipping and coming forward as an informant.¹⁰ Kaleb Cole led AWD's Washington State cell until he was arrested on conspiracy charges based on his threats against journalists and activists.¹¹

AWD maintains a global presence, with affiliates or links to groups in several countries, including the UK, Germany, Russia, the Baltic States, and Ukraine, discussed in more detail on page 13.

GOALS AND IDEOLOGY

AWD's ultimate goal is to accelerate societal collapse, promote chaos, and create a racially-pure white society.¹² The group seeks to do this by committing violence against racial minorities, the LGBTQ+ community, leftist organizations, government institutions, law enforcement personnel, and infrastructure. In online forums and through its propaganda, AWD idolizes individuals like Timothy McVeigh, Dylan Roof, Anders Breivik, and Brenton Tarrant—all of whom have committed terrorist attacks in the service of white supremacist ideology. These individuals serve as martyrs to be lionized and worshipped. AWD also draws ideological inspiration from Charles Manson, Joseph Tommasi, William Pierce, and James Mason, the latter of whom has been described by experts as AWD's de-facto figurehead or spiritual leader. As mentioned in the introduction, Mason recorded and published a statement on behalf of AWD in mid-March, announcing that the group was officially disbanding. However, some analysts have speculated that the announcement was a feint designed to preempt designation and thus, avoid sanctions. Notably, Mason is the author of *SIEGE*, a white supremacist and neo-Nazi newsletter published in the 1980s that fixated on terrorism and racial war, and that has since been turned into a nearly 600-page book of racist ramblings. *SIEGE* remains popular and inspiring to certain racist constituencies globally, and is considered mandatory reading for AWD aspirants.

AWD’S PRESENCE OVERSEAS AND TRANSNATIONAL LINKS

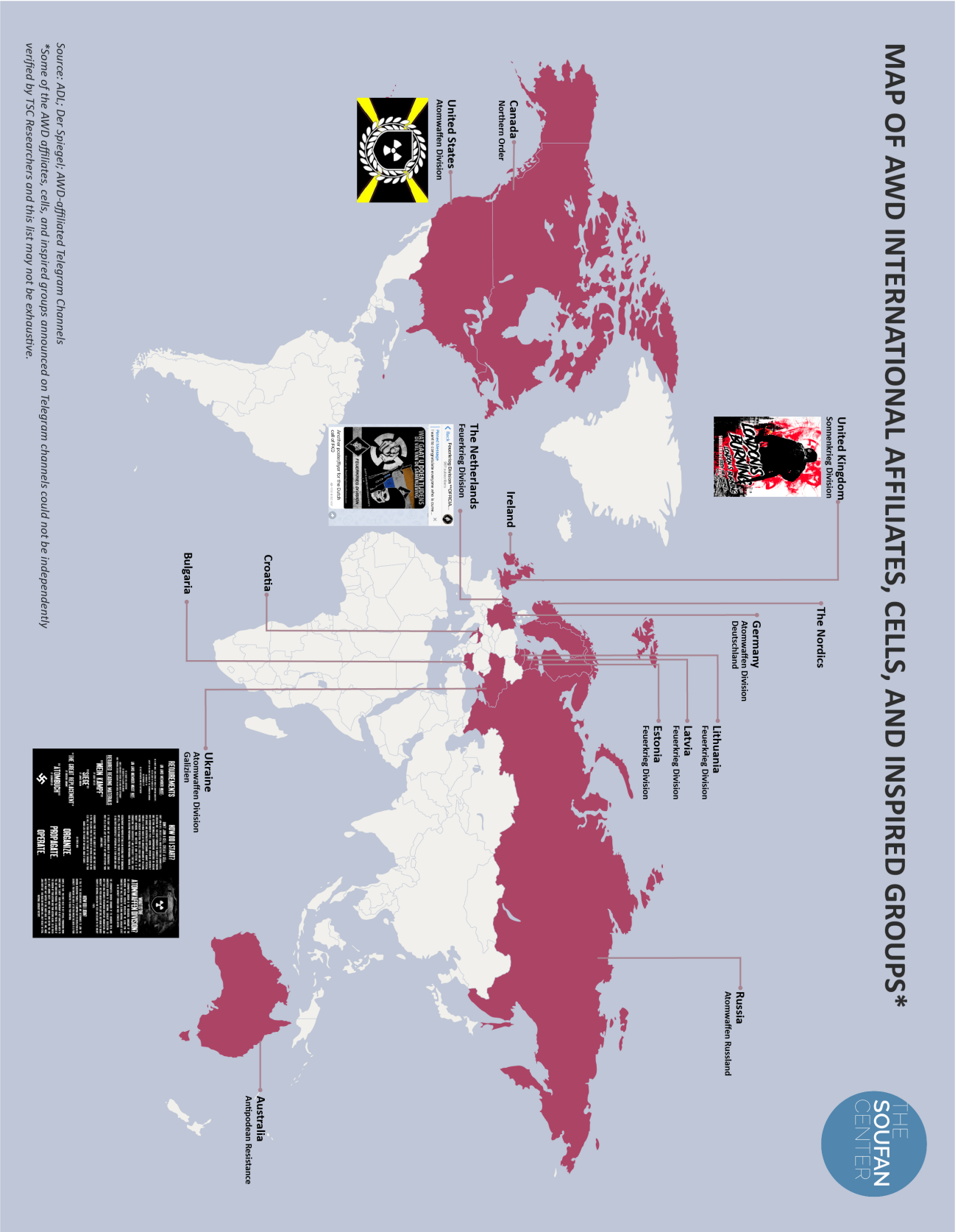
AWD in the United States has given rise to offshoots and branches in over a dozen countries, particularly across Europe, where the group’s members communicate with their global affiliates, forming a visible, if loose network of white supremacist terrorist cells. AWD members of the group’s international affiliates, particularly in the UK and Germany, have been charged with threats and terrorism-related charges. Ukraine has emerged as a critical node in the transnational white supremacy extremism network. Specifically, white supremacist organizations and individuals see the conflict in eastern Ukraine as a battlefield laboratory where they travel to gain actual combat experience—something many seek to bring back to their countries

U.S. members of AWD are known to have traveled and networked throughout Europe. For example, the leader of AWD’s Washington State cell, Kaleb Cole, completed a 25-day trip to Europe, including the Czech Republic, Poland, and Ukraine – an emerging hub for violent white supremacists from around the world. While in Kyiv, he attended the 2018 edition of *Asgardsrei*, a black metal music festival under the patronage of the Azov Battalion, and had the opportunity to network with white supremacists from other countries. Below are the most prominent international affiliates of AWD.

Baltic States: Feuerkrieg Division

The Feuerkrieg Division (FKD), an offshoot inspired by AWD, was established in late 2018 in the Baltics, likely in Estonia.¹³ It has since expanded across Europe, with a footprint in Belgium, the

Figure 1: Map of AWD International Affiliates, Cells, and Inspired Groups



United Kingdom, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Latvia, Germany, and Russia. FKD combines the accelerationism, terrorism, anti-Semitism, and white supremacist ideology of AWD with survivalism. FKD has been linked to violent plots in the United States and Europe, including death threats made against Belgian MEP Guy Verhofstadt and planned attacks on Las Vegas establishments, including a synagogue and gay bar.^{14,15} An FKD-linked U.S. Army soldier, Jarrett William Smith, pleaded guilty in February to charges related to an attack he was planning on the media company CNN using explosives.¹⁶ In November 2019, the Dutch chapter of FKD posted a map depicting the route used by a member of the Green Party to bicycle to work, encouraging violence against the elected member. Earlier this year, Estonian authorities arrested a 13-year-old boy who allegedly was radicalized by FKD online and then helped run FKD activities from his computer using the handle ‘commander.’ The existence, expansion, and reach of FKD highlights the dangerous appeal that AWD and AWD-style ideology holds for white supremacist extremists worldwide – and their links to violent plots targeting the United States and other Western countries.

In July 2020, the United Kingdom added FKD to its list of proscribed organizations – making it the third neo-Nazi group added since 2016 to the UK’s list, in addition to National Action and Sonnenkrieg Division (SKD), the UK’s home-grown AWD affiliate.¹⁷ The UK’s Home Office describes FKD as white supremacist group with an international footprint, and members across North America and Europe. The proscription was made shortly after FKD distributed a list of police buildings and urged followers to attack police in retaliation for the arrest of one of its members.

United Kingdom: Sonnenkrieg Division

The Sonnenkrieg Division (SKD) is a UK-based offshoot of AWD that maintains its links to AWD in the United States through online communication. SKD was designated as a terrorist group in the UK on February 25, 2020.

SKD is a successor to a previous neo-Nazi group, the System Resistance Network, which itself is an alias for the group National Action, a banned neo-Nazi group. SKD surfaced when members advocated assassinating Prince Harry for marrying Meghan Markle, calling him a ‘race traitor.’¹⁸ A BBC investigation revealed exchanges of messages between AWD and SKD members over the Discord platform.¹⁹ An image has surfaced of SKD member Oskar Dunn-Koczorowski and Andrew Dymock (the alleged leader of SKD) wearing an AWD hoodie and an Azov Battalion T-shirt, respectively. In June 2019, Koczorowski and fellow SKD member Michal Szewczuk, were jailed for terrorism offenses. Dymock was arrested in June 2019 at London Gatwick airport on his

Figure 2: SKD Leading Figures in Atomwaffen and Azov Battalion-branded attire



Andrew Dymock (L) and Oskar Dunn-Koczorowski (R) of the Sonnenkrieg Division. Dymock is wearing an Azov Battalion T-shirt and Dunn-Koczorowski is wearing an AWD hoodie.

Source: Twitter @Jake_Hanrahan

way to the United States, likely to meet with U.S. members of AWD²⁰, and is facing 15 charges, including 12 terrorism charges.²¹

SKD members have exhibited an obsession with sexual violence, murder, and occultism, representing an evolution in extremism from its predecessors. In addition to calling for the assassination of Prince Harry, members have glorified Norwegian mass murderer Anders Breivik and have called for white women who date non-white men to be killed. Breivik has become an icon for aspiring violent white supremacists, neo-Nazis, and racists alike.²²

The emergence of SKD as a successor to the System Resistance Network and an offshoot of AWD reveals the noxious, transnational feedback loop that has emerged between white supremacist extremist groups in the United States and Europe, facilitated by online communications in diverse forums – in this case, a gaming server. Communications between white supremacist extremist members can be facilitated across encrypted platforms and other

easily accessible mediums in 2020, presenting a significant challenge to law enforcement and intelligence services trying to monitor these groups.

Germany: AWD Deutschland (AWD-D)

German supporters of AWD have maintained contact with AWD in the United States since at least 2017.²³ The first instance of threats and activity by a German offshoot of AWD emerged in 2018-2019. In June 2019, ahead of the 15th anniversary of the 2004 bombing of a Turkish neighborhood in Cologne by neo-Nazis that injured 22 people, pamphlets written by AWD-D were found in the area.²⁴ In late 2019, purported members of the group sent death threats to Green Party members of Parliament Cem Ozdemir and Claudia Roth, claiming the two of them were at the top of the group’s ‘kill list.’²⁵

Figure 3: German-Language AWD Propaganda Poster



AWD-D should be analyzed within the context of a rising right-wing extremist threat in Germany, which German intelligence agencies have begun to monitor intensively. Thomas Haldewang, the president of Germany’s domestic intelligence agency, has called far-right extremism and terrorism the ‘biggest danger to German democracy today.’²⁶ The rise of the German far-right, exemplified by the growing influence of the anti-immigrant Alternative for Germany party in the years since the peak of its migrant crisis in 2015, has provided fertile ground for extremist elements to flourish.

Other AWD Global Developments to Watch

On June 1, 2020 AWD-D announced, on what is believed to be the group’s official Telegram channel, a new affiliate reportedly based in Russia named ‘AWD Russland.’ This latest AWD

affiliate is an interesting addition given AWD’s Iron March roots. The emergence of this Russian affiliate means that AWD’s evolution from Russia-based Iron March has come full circle, as Alexander Slavros appears to have been principally involved in the ideology and recruitment strategy of AWD. Messages between Slavros and AWD co-founders, Devon Arthurs and

Brandon Russell, indicate that Slavros had become a trusted decision-maker in AWD and helped transform it into a transnational terrorist organization.^{27,28} Little is currently known about the activities of AWD Russland, but it is nonetheless an important AWD affiliate to watch.

AWD’S TACTICS, MESSAGE, AND TERRORIST ACTIVITY

AWD Abroad

AWD’s various international affiliates have committed acts of intimidation, including by issuing threats online and through pamphlets, and have allegedly maintained links to combatants in the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Several AWD affiliate members have been charged with terrorism-related offenses, and some have been imprisoned. Their targets have ranged from left-wing politicians and Turkish immigrants in Germany to Prince Harry in the UK.

A video released December 10, 2019 showed AWD’s Ukrainian branch, AWD Galizien, pledging allegiance to the group. The announcement of a potential AWD affiliate or inspired group in Ukraine presents a dangerous avenue for AWD members from around the world who wish to travel, train, and gain combat experience. These kinds of videos also show similarities in the way that ISIS and al-Qaeda maintain affiliates and franchise groups throughout the world.²⁹ For example, the video announcing the creation of AWD-D similarly included a pledge of allegiance, with a masked man saying: ‘And to our true commanders of Atomwaffen Division in the United States. Greetings from Germany.’

The official pledge that AWD affiliates have offered to the group’s leadership should not go unnoticed. Similar to al-Qaeda or ISIS affiliates, an official pledge of allegiance or loyalty can be important symbolically. Furthermore, it can signal that these affiliates or franchise groups report exclusively to the core organization, establishing a direct line of command-and-control that

strengthens the ability of both the core group and the affiliate to launch attacks. A formal affiliation can also bring with it material benefits, including weapons, fighters, or money.

In fact, AWD has created several recruitment and propaganda videos that, apart from being notably well-produced, harken on symbolism and language used by Salafi-jihadist organizations, including ISIS. In October 2019, AWD posted a video titled “Fission” on an encrypted chat forum depicting a masked man who is wielding a knife and burning the U.S., EU, and Israeli flags – bearing a striking resemblance to ISIS videos featuring ‘Jihadi John.’ The masked man uses phrases like: ‘We will vanquish the modern world in totality...’ and ‘...join us, or perish with the rest!’ and proclaims that there will be no negotiations and no compromises, similar to the views al-Qaeda portrays in its video and audio messages to attract new recruits around the world.

Figure 4: AWD Affiliate’s Pledge of Allegiance Videos



AWD in the United States

AWD members have been linked to brazen acts of violence in the United States – including at least five murders – and have been arrested and convicted of violent crimes. One of the most high-profile AWD-linked cases is that of Samuel Woodward, who allegedly murdered Blaze Bernstein, a California college student killed because of his identity of being Jewish and gay. AWD members celebrated Bernstein’s murder and specifically lauded Woodward for his anti-Semitic attack. The group has also been linked to killings in Florida, Virginia, and California.

AWD members have also participated in so-called ‘hate camps,’ or paramilitary-style training camps in Nevada, Illinois, Washington State, California, and Texas.³⁰ AWD appears to be among the strongest ‘brands’ in the broader white supremacist extremist milieu. In particular, Americans have been the face of AWD, and have sought to leverage the group’s popularity online to spread its message.

AWD’s message has resonated with former and active-duty military members (including veterans from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq), making the group particularly dangerous given the tactical expertise and combat experience of some of its members.³¹ Recruiting active duty military personnel, or individuals with a military background, appears to be a deliberate recruitment strategy of AWD from its inception. In its early days, AWD leaders articulated a recruitment strategy that seeks to infiltrate the U.S. military and targets individuals, including those under the age of 25.³² One such individual was Vasillios Pistolis, an active member of the U.S. Marines when he (in his own words) ‘cracked three skulls open’ at the now infamous August 2017 ‘Unite the Right’ rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, which was attended by a ‘who’s who’ of prominent white supremacists and alt-right leaders.³³ Russell, a member of the Florida National Guard and a founding member of AWD, was found in possession of a cooler in his garage containing explosives and explosive precursors.³⁴

Four out of six AWD members convicted of crimes have military experience, which enhances their ability to commit deadly violence and also contributes to the group's allure and bona fides. Recruiting individuals with a military background, especially veterans with combat experience, is a deliberate recruitment tactic of AWD that other white supremacist and neo-Nazi groups are likely to emulate. There are also concerns that neo-Nazis or white supremacists could seek out the military to gain experience and training in various combat-related tactics.

AWD is also known to engage with other WSE organizations in the United States, including The Base, to participate in events and rallies organized by the WSE movement, and plan and conduct acts of violence against civilians, infrastructure, and houses of worship. Given the broad nature of violent white supremacy, one could envision fluidity between these organizations in the future, for example, individuals leaving AWD to join The Base, or vice versa. In fact, there is overlap between AWD's membership and The Base's membership.³⁵ In one high-profile case, Richard Tobin, a member of both AWD and The Base, was arrested by the FBI for his role in the vandalism of synagogues in the Midwest.³⁶

Figure 5: AWD and The Base Picture



AWD'S THREAT TO U.S. NATIONAL SECURITY

AWD taps into explicit and even tacit acceptance of racist views and encourages racist violence to intimidate minority populations in pursuit of its goal of destabilizing society in preparation for a race war. As discussed earlier, AWD grew out of the website Iron March, a forum popular with fascists that helped recruit AWD's core membership and which serves as a nucleus for hate, with consequences that moved beyond the internet and into the real world. Regular visitors to this site have gone on to form their own fascist groups in both the United States and Europe.

Overall, AWD's popularity swelled following the 'Unite the Right' rally in Charlottesville, VA, in August 2017. AWD member Samuel Woodward's murder of Blaze Bernstein, a California college student killed for being Jewish and gay, was one of the more high-profile AWD attacks, which served to intimidate and threaten gays and Jews on a U.S. college campus.

Like various jihadi terrorist groups, AWD's global presence operates as a loosely-connected but unmistakably transnational movement, one that maintains a significant presence overseas. The links that AWD has forged with like-minded individuals in foreign countries have created a feedback loop of violent rhetoric being exchanged online, which has the potential to turn into violence offline. And while AWD has a domestic presence, it is a broader global entity, under which a wide umbrella of international sub-groups and individuals actively participate. AWD's global presence and ability to coordinate attacks and train its members internationally outweighs its smaller and less coordinated domestic presence in the United States.

CONCLUSION

AWD should no longer be considered solely a U.S.-based violent white supremacist group given its expanding international presence. The UK, one of the U.S.’ strongest allies on counterterrorism, has recognized the threat of AWD’s affiliates and offshoots – proscribing two of them over the last six months alone. AWD’s origins and strength as an attractive online network, including for young men, should not be taken lightly, especially as the COVID-19 pandemic has caused millions to spend the majority of their time home and online. In the midst of the coronavirus crisis that has led millions to economic despair and uprooted quotidian patterns of life, there is a large and growing pool of disaffected individuals in search of answers. Neo-Nazi and white supremacist propaganda is uniquely tailored to this moment, suggesting that foreigners and political elites are directly responsible for society’s ills.³⁷ The parallel growth of other far-right elements, including anti-government militias, conspiracy theorists, and newer ideologies like the so-called ‘Boogaloo Bois,’ should not be viewed as competition for group’s like AWD, but rather as a potential complement. Disaffected members of these other movements, hardline elements that find themselves more motivated by race and accelerationism, could migrate to violent neo-Nazi and white supremacist groups over time. There remain important differences and distinctions within the ideologies of various far-right extremists, but there is also overlap and an affinity between some members of the most extreme elements of these networks.³⁸

Should AWD’s online network ever metastasize into a full-scale underground terror movement, it could draw upon an anonymous globalized network with an indeterminate number of capable and committed supporters. This transnational movement could conduct attacks in the group’s

name, but without a recognized command-and-control structure — more akin to the wave of so-called ‘lone wolf’ attacks inspired by the Islamic State between 2015 and 2019. AWD is also now displaying some savvy with respect to changing its name and attempting to label itself a paramilitary *and* political group, according to its new rebranding as the National Socialist Order, a name that evokes memories of a violent neo-Nazi group known as ‘The Order,’ which operated on U.S. soil in the early to mid-1980s.

The U.S. Government should devote serious consideration to sanctioning AWD, as it meets the criteria to be labeled a terrorist group, since AWD maintains a foreign presence; its terrorist activity has constituted a threat to U.S. national security’ interests; and it has demonstrated an ability to commit terrorist attacks, which have been enabled or facilitated through its paramilitary training camps. The case of Conor Climo, plotter of an attack on several Las Vegas establishments, is a case-in-point. Climo communicated with FKD members abroad in planning his attack, which was meant to kill and cause damage in a major American city. In so doing he showed a proclivity for terrorism, at least partly facilitated by foreign links. By sanctioning AWD, the hope is to mitigate the real and growing white supremacist threat and prevent the continued international growth of this network. Thus far, the Federal Bureau of Investigation has worked to disrupt AWD, arresting its members and preventing the group from operating as a more cohesive entity. Even AWD’s self-declared ‘executive leadership’ admits as much, noting that its members spend so much time on operational security that there are fewer opportunities for planning new attacks.³⁹ Affording law enforcement and intelligence services with more resources in combating transnational violent white supremacist groups could prevent these networks from evolving into more organized and capable adversaries, as occurred with the growth of Salafi-jihadist groups and their affiliates over the past two decades.

AWD members who have participated in paramilitary training camps have demonstrated a desire to forge transnational links and have gone on to plan attacks in the United States. Kaleb Cole, described as the Washington state cell leader of AWD, serves as an example. Cole is known to have helped organize and participated in paramilitary training camps in Washington State and Nevada—the latter training camp was named the ‘Death Valley Hate Camp’ by AWD and took place on January 25, 2018. In December of 2018, Cole and two other AWD members traveled to Europe for 25 days to network with likeminded individuals. They brought with them an AWD flag, which they posed with outside of Auschwitz concentration camp and donned at the infamous *Asgardsrei* festival that was reportedly attended by almost 1,000 foreigners.

In May and June of 2019, Cole was in Quebec and British Columbia to allegedly visit his girlfriend. While in Canada, he was detained and deported on the grounds of being a ‘member of an organization that may engage in terrorism,’ under Section 34 (1)(F) of the Immigration and

Refugee Protection Act, and banned from Canada for life. In 2019, Cole had several run-ins with federal law enforcement, including having his weapons confiscated under an Extreme Risk Protection Order. In February 2020, Cole—alongside three other AWD members—was arrested and charged with conspiracy to mail threatening communications and cyberstalking. Cole and fellow AWD members sought to threaten and intimidate journalists, specifically journalists of color or who were identified as Jewish, in what they called “Operation Erste Säule.” Cole was deemed by the FBI as a primary organizer of the hate campaign. From the case of Cole, it is evident that AWD leaders are seeking to train members in paramilitary tactics, forge international connections, and use their knowledge and network to carry out acts of violence, hate, and intimidation.⁴⁰

While some entities of the U.S. Government may find it challenging to designate AWD because of its domestic presence, it will be crucial to consider other legal options to criminalize the activities of AWD to the fullest extent of the law, including adjusting the current legal frameworks on terrorism to address groups like AWD, who boast both a domestic and international presence and can easily operate in a gray area and escape more severe criminal penalties. One consideration could be updating the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), section 219, which addresses the criteria for designating an organization as a terrorist group. Amending the criteria with an eye towards providing more flexibility for the designation of groups that have both a foreign and domestic presence could close the gap that allows for groups like AWD to remain undesignated. Just as E.O. 13224 was recently modernized by the Trump Administration in September 2019, updating the INA’s FTO provisions (the last substantive legislative update more than 15 years ago) would close the legal loophole that permits groups like AWD to skirt sanctions. Such an update would allow for AWD to be designated, and could be helpful in curbing this threat, including by preventing the travel of AWD members abroad, cutting off their financial networks, and providing access to the resources necessary for such groups to be thoroughly investigated.

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ABOUT THE SOUFAN CENTER

Based in New York, The Soufan Center is a non-partisan strategy center dedicated to serving as a resource and forum for research, analysis and strategic dialogue related to global security issues and emergent threats. TSC fills a niche-role by producing independent, quality research and hosting proactive events in order to effectively equip thought leaders, policy makers, governments, bi- and multilateral institutions, the media, funders, and those in the non-profit and academic communities to engage in strategic security-related practices. Our work focuses on a broad range of complex security issues—from international and domestic terrorism, to humanitarian crisis analysis, to refugee and immigrant issues, and more.

TSC's dynamic team of research and policy analysts, with diverse professional, educational and cultural backgrounds—including experience in human rights; international development; federal, state and local government; law enforcement; and military—leverage subject matter expertise against real-world experience to offer world-class investigative methodologies, innovative analytical tools, and contextualized, actionable solutions.

ENDNOTES

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