



Submission from the Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council (AIJAC) to the Inquiry into Extremism in Victoria

Introduction

As the premier independent public affairs organisation for the Australian Jewish community, the Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council (AIJAC) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Legal and Social Issues Committee's inquiry into extremism in Victoria to highlight the nature of the threat that far-right extremism – and indeed, other forms of extremism – pose to Victoria and its multicultural communities, particularly the Jewish community.

Australia has thankfully never experienced the mass casualty far-right violence that has afflicted the United States, Europe, and New Zealand. This should not lead to complacency, but neither should it lead to threat inflation. The current threat stemming from *organised* far-right violence is low: almost all major far-right terrorist attacks globally have been only vaguely affiliated or entirely unaffiliated with any specific far-right group. Yet it is clear that the threat from far-right-inspired attacks by individuals – similar to the Christchurch massacre of 2019 or the supermarket mass shooting in Buffalo, New York, on May 14 of this year – is substantial and likely increasing.

In Victoria, far-right activity is overwhelmingly characterised by intimidation, threats and harassment in the form of phone calls and letters, graffiti and vandalism and noxious remarks and gestures, including the Nazi salute. Recently, neo-Nazi Thomas Sewell, currently out on bail after being arrested last year, organised a celebration of Adolf Hitler's birthday at The Hof Downtown beer hall in Melbourne, replete with Nazi salutes.¹

The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent public health measures and related conspiracy theories has created space for the far right to create popular fronts with populist, libertarian, and left-wing groups and individuals. As the Victoria Police noted in its submission to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security Inquiry into Extremist Movements and Radicalism in Australia:

¹ Suzan Delibasic and Craig Dunlop, "Fury after Melbourne neo-Nazis celebrate Hitler's birthday at The Hof Downtown," *Herald Sun* (4 May 2022), <https://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/victoria/melbourne-nazi-group-led-by-racist-tom-sewell-celebrated-adolf-hitlers-birthday-at-docklands-bar-the-hof-downtown-prompting-calls-for-crackdown/news-story/935b0e8684b23fe5c96e9505de0a4b93>.

*Online commentary on Covid-19 has provided a recruiting tool for right-wing extremist groups, linking those interested in alternative wellness, anti-vaccination and anti-authority conspiracy theories with white supremacist ideologies.*²

As a result of process, the very use of the term “far right” to describe the threat has become less useful as a descriptor of the threat as this coalition of neo-Nazis, conspiracy theorists, populists, libertarians and leftists has coalesced, leading Victoria Police to warn in its submission that it was ill-prepared to deal with these “conflating ideologies” which have “presented a challenge in effectively tasking and investigating these individuals as they do not fit neatly into pre-existing tasking and coordination frameworks.”³

Governments, parliaments and law enforcement agencies will therefore need to reconsider how useful these traditional categories and approaches, such as focussing exclusively on the “far right” without considering the wider picture of extremism, remain.

Meanwhile, this submission also notes that extreme right terrorist violence is overwhelmingly emanating from individuals radicalised and inspired by material on the internet and social media, and urges all counter-terrorism authorities to consider measures to ameliorate the effects of this pipeline for violent extremist beliefs.

Finally, AIJAC calls the committee’s attention to two previous AIJAC submissions that we believe may be relevant to its deliberations – our “Submission to the Australian Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security regarding extremist movements and radicalism in Australia”, and our “Submission to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security on its review into the listing of Hizballah and The Base as terrorist organisations under the Criminal Code Act 1995.”⁴

Recommendations

To combat the threat of the far right in Victoria, AIJAC recommends that the Victorian Government:

- Fully implements its expansion of anti-vilification measures, including the Swastika ban, announced in May 2022, and moves to outlaw the Nazi salute.
- Expands efforts to keep abreast of new racist codewords and gestures used by the far right and other conspiracy theorists in order to ban their public use under anti-vilification measures.

² Elias Visontay, “Far right ‘exploiting’ anger at lockdowns to radicalise wellness community, police say”, *Guardian* (25 Feb 2021), <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/feb/25/far-right-exploiting-anger-at-lockdowns-to-radicalise-wellness-community-police-say>.

³ Victoria Police Submissions to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security Inquiry into Extremist Movements and Radicalism in Australia Victoria Police submission, https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Intelligence_and_Security/ExtremistMovements/Submissions.

⁴ These submissions can be downloaded from AIJAC’s website using these links - <https://aijac.org.au/submissions/aijacs-submission-to-the-australian-parliamentary-joint-committee-on-intelligence-and-security-regarding-extremist-movements-and-radicalism-in-australia/>; <https://aijac.org.au/submissions/submission-to-the-parliamentary-joint-committee-on-intelligence-and-security-on-its-review-into-the-listing-of-hizballah-and-the-base-as-terrorist-organisations-under-the-criminal-code-act-1995/>.

- Implements the recommendations it supported as part of the 2021 Legislative Assembly Legal and Social Issues Committee’s Inquiry into Anti-Vilification Protections.
- Follows up its important positive step of adopting the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism on May 11 with efforts to implement the definition across government bodies.
- Moves towards a more comprehensive counterextremism policy based on the concept of “ideologically motivated violent extremism” (IMVE) rather than compartmentalising the far right as distinct and separate from other forms of ideological extremism.
- Continues to liaise with local multicultural community organisations to monitor the extent and type of IMVE activity.
- Seeks to learn lessons from the inquiry into the Christchurch massacre and increases counter-terrorism funding and attention towards addressing extremism. This includes monitoring extremist individuals and groups, and ongoing funding towards the security of vulnerable communities.
- Advocates to the Commonwealth Government to list Thomas Sewell’s National Socialist Network (NSN), which is based primarily in Victoria, and any related groups, as a terrorist organisations under Division 102 of the *Criminal Code Act 1995*.
- Continues to develop the countering violent extremism (CVE) programs in Victoria, including the Network for Intervention and Tailored Engagement (NITE) program and Community Integration Support Program (CISP).
- Explores both persuasive and regulatory strategies to make social media platforms more transparent and accountable for damages caused by dangerous misinformation and hate content posted by users.

How useful is a focus on the “far right”?

As noted above, the Victoria police have rightly pointed out that the term “far-right” is increasingly describing some very different phenomenon and belief systems and this “presented a challenge in effectively tasking and investigating these individuals as they do not fit neatly into pre-existing tasking and coordination frameworks.”⁵

The Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) has suggested a different categorisation of extremism that may be more useful. In March 2021, ASIO Director-General Mike Burgess announced that ASIO would now adopt two umbrella terms for the threats Australia faced: religiously motivated violent extremism (RMVE) and ideologically motivated violent extremism (IMVE), the latter encompassing the threat of the nebulously defined “far right”. Explaining the decision, Burgess said:

The current labels are no longer fit for purpose; they no longer adequately describe the phenomena we’re seeing... when thinking about the proliferation of violent groups that subscribe to various political ideologies, it’s unhelpful to categorise such groups as simply ‘extreme left wing’ and ‘extreme right wing’... We are seeing a growing number of individuals and groups that don’t fit on the left–right spectrum at all; instead, they’re

⁵ Victoria Police Submissions to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security Inquiry into Extremist Movements and Radicalism in Australia Victoria Police submission, https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Intelligence_and_Security/ExtremistMovements/Submissions.

motivated by a fear of societal collapse or a specific social or economic grievance or conspiracy.⁶

In addition, even if one were to continue to use traditional classifications of violent extremism as right versus left versus Islamist, it would be dangerous and destructive to neglect and ignore the left-wing and Islamist varieties while seeking to address the undoubted growth of the extreme right threat.

It is worth remembering that, since 2001, every single terrorist incident in Australia that led to death or injury was carried out for Islamist extremist motives⁷ – while over the same period, there have been, as yet, no serious attacks by far-right extremists of the kind that have become increasingly common overseas (though there have been several far-right extremists convicted of early preparations for such attacks).⁸

A new official report into Prevent – the UK Government's flagship counter-extremism policy – has reportedly concluded that this body had recently come to focus too heavily on the far right and “renewed focus on Islamist extremism is needed.”⁹ Australian authorities, at both state and federal level, must not make the same mistake.

The very necessary focus on the threats emanating from the extreme right cannot be at the expense of continued vigilance against other violent extremist threats – especially Islamist, but also extreme left, extremist environmentalist, anarchist, “incel”, other religious extremist, foreign nationalist and others.

More than this, today there is often significant cross-fertilisation in terms of tactics and ideas between what seem to be very different forms of ideology. For instance, scholars have documented how some neo-Nazi and white supremacist groups have openly looked to Islamist terror organisations, such as Islamic State, “as a model and inspiration” for their own efforts.¹⁰ An exclusive focus on the far right would miss these important linkages and cross-fertilisation.

This was noted by the Victoria Police in its submission to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security Inquiry into Extremist Movements and Radicalism in Australia: “individuals and groups who adhere to [Right-wing extremist] ideologies have diverse and multifaceted ideological views. It is not a cohesive cohort.” Furthermore, the submission points out, “The [far right] threat does not exist in a vacuum and is directly influenced by a

⁶ Director-General’s Annual Threat Assessment (17 March 2021), <https://www.asio.gov.au/publications/speeches-and-statements/director-generals-annual-threat-assessment-2021.html>.

⁷ Based on the data in the Global Terrorism Database, accessed on 17 May 2022, https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/Results.aspx?expanded=no&casualties_type=&casualties_max=&success=yes&country=14&ob=GTDID&od=desc&page=1&count=50#results-table. See also https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_terrorist_incidents_in_Australia.

⁸ For a list, see AIJAC’s factsheet titled “Far-Right Extremism”, <https://aijac.org.au/fact-sheets/far-right-extremism/>.

⁹ Sophie Huskisson and Kaya Terry, “Government’s counter-terrorism programme targeted mainstream rightwing views as ‘far-right’ while ignoring Islamist extremism and backing groups that promoted the TALIBAN, says bombshell leaked report”, *Daily Mail* (17 May 2022), <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10822963/Counter-terrorism-programme-focused-far-Right-fanatics-report-finds.html>

¹⁰ Stephen Stalinsky, “Neo-Nazis Look To Forge Bromance With Jihadis”, Middle East Media Research Institute, Jan. 11, 2022 - <https://www.memri.org/reports/neo-nazis-look-forge-bromance-jihadis>.

symbiotic relationship with the threat of left wing extremism.”¹¹ This is why an IMVE prism, rather than “far right”, is a more useful one to discuss the threat.

The US-based Anti-Defamation League (ADL) has also objected to the use of the term “far right” because “some people use the term ‘far right’ to also incorporate some aspects of mainstream conservatism, the term is more vague than extreme right or radical right and thus is not preferred.” The ADL notes that even its preferred term, “extreme right”, which is “used to describe right-wing political, social and religious movements that exist outside of and are more radical than mainstream conservatism” is something of an oversimplification which can hide some nuances.

The ADL notes the “extreme right” actually “Consists primarily of two large, slightly overlapping spheres. In one sphere is the white supremacist movement, including its various submovements, such as neo-Nazis, racist skinheads, and the alt right, among others. In the other sphere are anti-government extremist movements such as the militia movement and sovereign citizens.” Moreover, “also in the extreme right are several ‘single-issue’ movements, which each tend to be the extreme wing of a more mainstream conservative movement; these include anti-abortion extremists, anti-immigrant extremists, anti-Muslim extremists, and anti-public lands extremists, among others.”¹²

Since these categories are so nebulous and the individuals and groups involved so fractious, it is difficult to discuss a single specific threat they pose to Victoria’s security or social cohesion, as the answer is likely to vary depending on which elements of the “extreme right” are being referred to.

It is perhaps best to focus on the “nationalist and racist violent extremist (NRVE)” groups like The Base, designated a terrorist group by Australia in November 2021. These groups, almost all of which are part of a transnational network and share members and ideologies, are “accelerationist”, meaning that they are “preparing and pushing for a ‘race war’, which...will cause societal collapse and the subsequent creation of a ‘white ethno-state’” who “believe societal collapse can be expedited through violence, including lone-actor terrorist attacks.”¹³ These groups, while they train and recruit members, operate on the principle of “leaderless resistance,” aiming to promote attacks by lone radicals or cells with limited contact.

To date, however, there is no evidence they’ve had much success, as none of the mass casualty attempted or successful attacks globally can be directly linked to them, though they find the attackers inspiring and share elements of their ideology. In addition, these groups themselves seem to be extremely fractious, and their millenarian belief in the inevitability of societal collapse has yet to translate into taking any serious organised action to precipitate it.

The Far Right in Victoria and COVID-19

As discussed above, opposition to public health measures related to COVID-19, from lockdowns to mask and vaccine mandates, has potentially created space for far-right actors to

¹¹ See note 3, p. 3.

¹² ADL, “Extreme Right / Radical Right / Far Right”, <https://www.adl.org/resources/glossary-terms/extreme-right-radical-right-far-right>.

¹³ Australian National Security, The Base, <https://www.nationalsecurity.gov.au/what-australia-is-doing/terrorist-organisations/listed-terrorist-organisations/the-base>.

recruit and radicalise outside of their immediate milieu based on shared attitudes and a shared conspiratorial worldview.

The best illustration of this phenomenon in Victoria is the case of Harrison McLean, a young IT programmer and key organiser of anti-lockdown protests, who wrote in extremist Telegram chatgroups about his goal of slowly introducing these COVID-19 conspiracy theorists and other anti-government individuals partaking in the protests to antisemitic conspiracy theories. McLean has denied he is a white supremacist and it is claimed he pushed back against some neo-Nazi ideas and individuals in his chat groups,¹⁴ although he said his goal is to:

Build a big tent movement from the libertarian right to nationalists to populists to independents to moderates and even some leftwing people all supporting freedom. It's about building one unified group that can embrace a wide range of political stances [and] to expand the Overton Window to some elements of movement that are currently more fringe...I would prefer for them [the Proud Boys] to be less fringe in the context of having their views be more acceptable ... but not in a way that involves any sort of violence, just the rhetoric and discourse.¹⁵

McLean is not the only far-right extremist to infiltrate the anti-lockdown protests. Others, including neo-Nazi Kenneth Panten and extremist Kate Callan, have also attempted to use the protests as a vehicle for recruitment and radicalisation. Additionally, extremist protesters calling for violence like Imre Pelyva have been arrested, while the addresses of members of the state Labor caucus in the past parliament were shared via encrypted messaging apps.¹⁶

Recruitment and messaging by the far right is often conducted via the encrypted Telegram messaging app, inter alia, as well as special purpose far-right social media sites, as mainstream sites like Facebook and Twitter crack down on conspiracy theories and racism. However, the cross-pollination of conspiracy theories and anti-government talking points even on mainstream social media sites does enable the far right to infiltrate more mainstream groups and promote their hateful ideologies to sympathetic conspiracy theorists and others across the political spectrum.

The last serious publicised plot by a far-right extremist in Victoria, however, was in early 2016 by Phillip Galea, who was charged in late 2020 for terrorism, although even this plot was allegedly aimed at damaging buildings rather than killing people.¹⁷

¹⁴ Tita Smith and Nick White, "IT nerd who organised Melbourne's week of mayhem returns to protesting for first time since being charged with incitement by accusing Dan Andrews of 'crimes against humanity' in an unhinged speech to anti-vaccine rally", *Daily Mail* (8 November 2021), <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10176417/Melbourne-protest-organiser-Harrison-Mclean-rallies-time-charged.html>.

¹⁵ Michael McGowan, "Where 'freedom' meets the far right: the hate messages infiltrating Australian anti-lockdown protests," *Guardian* (26 March 2021), <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/mar/26/where-freedom-meets-the-far-right-the-hate-messages-infiltrating-australian-anti-lockdown-protests>.

¹⁶ Nick McKenzie and Clay Lucas, "Far-right protester charged by counter-terror police amid talk of killing Daniel Andrews," *The Age* (18 November 2021), <https://www.theage.com.au/politics/victoria/far-right-protester-charged-by-counter-terror-police-amid-talk-of-killing-daniel-andrews-20211117-p599qx.html>.

¹⁷ Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions, "Phillip Galea jailed for terrorist offences", <https://www.cdpp.gov.au/case-reports/phillip-galea-jailed-terrorist-offences>.

In terms of organised neo-Nazi groups, the most infamous in Victoria currently is Thomas Sewell's NSN. However, the group was described by security sources to *The Age* as "disorganised, amateurish outfit, riven with internal conflicts", and as less a security threat and more "an incubator for political violence", with one source asserting that "Most of these NSN guys are blowhards".¹⁸

ASIO Director-General Mike Burgess also emphasised that "[Far-right] groups promote hateful ideologies but that does not automatically put them in the same threat category as ISIL or al-Qa'ida" and that "ASIO has the difficult but critical job of distinguishing between talk and action, aspiration and capability."¹⁹ For now, Australia is lucky that insofar as an organised far right exists, it is mostly talk, however heinous its ideas, rhetoric and activities.

The Far Right, COVID-19 conspiracies and the Jewish Community in Victoria

Unfortunately, the Overton Window has shifted during COVID-19, with once fringe positions and conspiracy theories being adopted by politicians and media personalities and an increase in Holocaust Distortion, in which symbols like the Yellow Star forced on the Jews by the Nazis are used by anti-lockdown protesters and Hitler and Nazi comparisons are increasingly and inappropriately used to describe government officials and policies.²⁰

Anti-lockdown protests in Melbourne have also included antisemitic signs, while dozens of anti-lockdown social media groups have been found to promote antisemitism and neo-Nazi views. BitChute, a video-sharing platform known as a haven for conspiracy theorists and the far right, featured videos of the Melbourne protests with comments such as "Jew jab kills" and "nobody worthwhile is taking the Jew jab", while graffiti reading "no Jew jab for Oz" was found along a protest route.²¹

According to the Executive Council of Australian Jewry's 2021 Antisemitism in Australia Report, between October 1, 2020, and September 30, 2021, 160 of the 447 antisemitic incidents occurred in Victoria, the majority of which involved graffiti, threatening calls, emails, and leaflets or abuse and harassment.²² Importantly, not all of these were necessarily far right in origin.

On May 8, it was reported that a man made a Nazi salute at a mother and her toddler in Caulfield.²³

Extremism and the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism

¹⁸ Nick McKenzie, "Neo-Nazi unmasked as former Young Liberal," *The Age* (12 February 2022), <https://www.theage.com.au/national/neo-nazi-unmasked-as-former-young-liberal-20220211-p59vpo.html>.

¹⁹ See note 4.

²⁰ Naomi Levin, "A Pandemic of Holocaust Distortion", *Australia Israel Review* (24 November 2021), <https://aijac.org.au/australia-israel-review/a-pandemic-of-holocaust-distortion/>.

²¹ Naomi Levin, "Antisemitic streak seen in Melbourne protests," *AIJAC* (30 September 2021), <https://aijac.org.au/fresh-air/antisemitic-streak-seen-in-melbourne-protests/>.

²² Julie Nathan, "REPORT on ANTISEMITISM in AUSTRALIA 2021", *ECAJ* (12 December 2021), <https://www.ecaj.org.au/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/ECAJ-Antisemitism-Report-2021.pdf>.

²³ Craig Dunlop and Suzan Delibasic, "Man makes Nazi salute at mum and son in Caulfield street", *Herald Sun* (8 May 2022), <https://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/victoria/man-makes-nazi-salute-at-mum-and-son-in-caulfield-street/news-story/c066d05f14bd24aa52ae71c566a09e0e>.

An important development in protecting the Victorian Jewish community against extremist violence was the announcement by Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews on May 11 that the state will adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Working Definition of Antisemitism. The Victorian announcement follows a similar announcement from the Federal Government regarding the IHRA definition last year, a move also supported by the Federal Opposition.

AIJAC views the definition – adopted by at least 32 countries, the European Union, and numerous local governments and institutions around the world – as an essential tool for identifying and responding to the antisemitism so widespread in extremist circles, and thus helping to protect the local Jewish community from it.

AIJAC is grateful to the Victorian Government and Opposition – which also called for its adoption – for the decision to adopt the IHRA definition, but urges that adoption must be only the first step in a process to implement the definition by operationalising it across government and indeed beyond. The purpose of adoption is to facilitate such uses as its employment by law enforcement to train police to understand when a crime may have an antisemitic motive; use by human rights tribunals and appeal bodies in their work; employment by universities and schools to identify and intervene against antisemitism; and for social media companies to better moderate antisemitism on their platforms by consulting the definition, among many other possible usages of the definition.

AIJAC urges the Victorian Government and Parliament to follow up the adoption of the IHRA definition with a detailed strategy to implement the definition’s operationalisation across government. AIJAC calls the attention of both the Committee and the Government to the European Union’s “Handbook for the practical use of the IHRA working definition of antisemitism”, which AIJAC views as the single best resource for implementing the decision to adopt the definition, and thus obtaining the full benefits of doing so.²⁴

Two far-right movements in Australia that appear to be a growing or ongoing threat

The National Socialist Network

The National Socialist Network is a white supremacist neo-Nazi group with members in most major cities in Australia. Its website states it is “loyal to National Socialism and nothing else”, and that it seeks “a revolution.” As noted above, it is based mainly in Victoria.

The NSN, which is reported to have more than 2,000 members on Telegram, uses the “great replacement theory” to recruit. Its leader, Thomas Sewell, began with the Lads Society but viewed it as not radical enough.

The NSN website states: “If White Australia is to survive, then it must organise itself towards this end, and only National Socialism—the highest and most sophisticated creed of the White man—can do this all-important task. National Socialism is the only worldview that puts racial survival first. Its values of health, strength and joyous struggle, stand in absolute contrast to this sickly society’s veneration of degeneracy, weakness and perpetual victimhood.” It also states, “We need to accept the revolutionary nature and methods of

²⁴ The European Union’s “Handbook for the practical use of the IHRA working definition of antisemitism” can be downloaded from this link - <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/d3006107-519b-11eb-b59f-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-185592396>.

National Socialism and drop the right-wing, conservative and reactionary nonsense. A revolution requires revolutionaries. We need men who are willing to do whatever is necessary regardless of the consequences. Revolution is first and foremost a mindset. The movement will depend on those who have the courage of their convictions and will not be intimidated.”²⁵

On January 7, 2021, the day after the storming of the US Capitol, a post on an NSN social media account reportedly hailed the “brave white men in Washington DC” who, the group wrote, “have lit a flame that will never go out”. It added, “The enemy’s spell has been broken forever ... those Jews and traitor politicians who had crowed so loudly about confronting White supremacy and racism ran and hid in the basement like the rats they are!” The post was accompanied by a photo of a sticker stating “white revolution is the only solution”. The sticker was placed at Commonwealth Place in Canberra, near Australia’s federal parliament.²⁶

According to the *Guardian*, in videos and posts published following the release of the New Zealand royal commission report into the Christchurch massacre, Thomas Sewell praised US shooter Kyle Rittenhouse as a “hero”, and encouraged his followers to “destroy multiculturalism”, “faggotry” and the “Jewish empire of evil”. In a video, Sewell told his followers he believed that “violence solves everything” before adding that he was “talking philosophically”. He reportedly said, “You cannot talk these things out,” adding “You cannot talk out your racial replacement. Or as [far-right activist Stefan] Molyneux says, there are no more arguments ... There are no arguments with these people. You separate from them, you make, you know, big fences away from them, and if they continue to trespass against you, well you’re left with no other option.”²⁷

The NSN is also believed to have taken part in the Grampians cross burning in January 2021. Around 40 men were seen performing Nazi salutes and chanting slogans such as “white power” and “heil Hitler” while camping and hiking in the national park.²⁸

QAnon

QAnon began in 2017 in the US but has spread internationally, including to Australia. Jews are increasingly the target of its conspiracy theories. It claims that an anonymous individual with a high-level US security clearance known as “Q” has evidence of a secret war led by former US President Donald Trump against a criminal cabal of Democratic politicians and Hollywood elite which they believe are Satan-worshipping paedophiles who operate a global child sex-trafficking ring. Its believers often claim that these activities are funded by prominent Jews, including George Soros and the Rothschild family.

²⁵ Nationalist Socialist Network, “White Revolution is the Only Solution” (n.d.), <https://national-socialist-network.info/worldview/white-revolution-is-the-only-solution/>.

²⁶ McGowan (2021).

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Brook, B. “Nationalist Socialist Network: Melbourne Neo-Nazi group seen in Grampians uncovered”, *news.com.au* (1 Feb 2021), <https://www.news.com.au/national/victoria/national-socialist-network-melbourne-neonazi-group-seen-in-grampians-uncovered/news-story/d6cee39c9d2b0d6e565cf7e339491a5a>.

According to the World Jewish Congress, “the QAnon core beliefs include antisemitic tropes related to the Protocols of the Elders of Zion and blood libel repackaged and rebranded for a modern audience”. An FBI intelligence bulletin from May 2019 described QAnon as a growing domestic terrorism threat in America.

Canadian QAnon researcher Marc-Andre Argentino has estimated that Australia was in the top-5 countries for QAnon activity. Argentino also observed a “fair amount of antisemitism” on Australian QAnon notice boards. Argentino’s observation is supported by AIJAC’s research.

During 2020, a significant amount of QAnon-related posts were shared by Australian-based social media accounts across a range of platforms, many of which spread common antisemitic tropes, such as Jewish people holding too much power; singling out Jewish figures for attack, such as George Soros or the Rothschild banking family; and invoking blood libel-style criticisms of the coronavirus vaccine.

While there has been no recorded links between Australian QAnon followers and violent attacks on Australian Jews, prominent Jewish figures in the United States have been targeted by supporters of QAnon.

According to Elise Thomas, a researcher with ASPI's International Cyber Policy Centre, the QAnon conspiracy theory was closely tied to the community of users on 8chan, an online forum where multiple far-right extremists have posted manifestos before launching their attacks (8chan was briefly driven offline in 2019, but has returned under the name 8kun).

While QAnon has declined somewhat since the departure of US President Trump from the White House last year, there is no reason to believe it has ceased to exist, and there is a significant risk that QAnon-established networks may persist to spread additional conspiracy theories and extremism.

An Islamist group of concern: Hizb ut-Tahrir

Founded in 1953, Hizb Ut-Tahrir (HT) is a pan-Islamic fundamentalist movement with branches in more than 50 countries, including in Australia. The movement calls for the re-establishment of a global Muslim Caliphate based on Islamic religious law (Sharia), while rejecting the integration of Muslims into non-Muslim societies. The movement is banned in Indonesia, Germany, Russia, China, Pakistan and most Arab countries.

Ismail Al-Wahwah (Abu Anas) is the leader of HT’s Australian branch, with hundreds of active members and many more followers. While Wahwah is based in NSW, there is a HT presence in Victoria, and the group has held at least two conferences in Melbourne.²⁹

²⁹ “Radical Islamic group Hizb ut-Tahrir to hold Melbourne forum”, *Herald Sun*, (5 Nov 2015), <https://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/victoria/radical-islamic-group-hizb-uttahrir-to-hold-melbourne-forum/news-story/576e3c7cee4c1da59055805a91187aea>; John Masanauskas, “Push to ban radical Islamic group”, *Courier Mail* (14 Oct 2011), <https://www.couriermail.com.au/ipad/jewish-community-wants-islamic-group-ccoutlawed/news-story/e4f9904451a9172bf4735ee8e3341e3a?nk=1687377d24a9db7a6655c225cec82b53-1652860492>.

On social media, in mosques and in public gatherings, Al-Wahwah and other HT Australia members openly promote violence and war, spread misinformation, antisemitism and conspiracy theories, call for the destruction of the State of Israel and for the murder of Jews and engage in Holocaust denial.

Using a variety of channels and methods, HT Australia spreads hatred and misinformation and urges the use of violence, terror and war, specifically targeting Jews.

HT leaders, for example³⁰:

- Refused to categorically condemn the terrorist organisation ISIS, and at the same time threatened to “send our troops to Australia, to France to Germany” in response to the war on ISIS.
- Repeatedly call for the destruction of the State of Israel and to expel the Jews from it: “the Jewish entity is cancer. And cancer, you have to get rid of it!”; calling on Muslim soldiers to unite and be killed attacking Israel; and promising “it will not take us two weeks to free the land of Filastin [Palestine]! So easy!”
- Publicly express antisemitic views to their audiences: “The Jews will not thrive and will not live in safety, because they are the slayers of the prophets [...] They are people with hearts of stone. Wherever the Jews thrive, corruption abounds. All the power in the hands of the Israelites was based on corruption - corruption in the media, moral corruption, financial corruption, political corruption, corruption in everything that is associated with the Jews.”
- Engage in Holocaust denial, publicly stating that “The only holocaust is the one that [the Jews] claim, exaggerate, blow out of proportion, lie about, and milk [the West] over in order to accomplish their goals.”
- Spread conspiracy theories, claiming for example that Qassim Soleimani, the Iranian military commander killed by the US in 2020, was an American agent and that Israel was behind the Beirut port explosion in August 2020; also suggesting that Islamist terror attacks in the West are actually masterminded by the governments of these countries.

Requests have been made for HT Australia to be proscribed as a terrorist group in Australia over the past two decades. In 2007, then Attorney-General Phillip Ruddock said the views of HT Australia were “inimicable with a liberal democratic society” but that the group did not meet the Commonwealth’s criteria for banning.³¹ The Australian Government re-considered

³⁰ Middle East Media Research Institute. “Friday Sermon by Australian Islamic Scholar Ismail Al-Wahwah: The Jews Exaggerate the Holocaust for Dirty Political Exploitation; Islam Will Conquer Rome and Moscow” (24 Jan 2020), <https://www.memri.org/tv/ismail-wahwah-hizb-tahrir-australia-imprisoned-jordan-holocaust-imposed-world-silence-israel-crimes-islam-victorious> ; Middle East Media Research Institute, “Australian Islamist Leaders Incite to Jihad to Expel Jews from Palestine” (24 July 2014), <https://www.memri.org/tv/australian-islamist-leaders-incite-jihad-expel-jews-palestine> ; Ran Porat, “The hateful rhetoric of Hizb ut-Tahrir Australia”, *Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council* (6 Oct 2020) <https://aijac.org.au/australia-israel-review/the-hateful-rhetoric-of-hizb-ut-tahrir-australia/> ; Ran Porat, “Yet more extremist voices in Australia exposed”, *Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council* (18 Dec 2020), <https://aijac.org.au/australia-israel-review/yet-more-extremist-voices-in-australia-exposed/> ; Ahron Shapiro, “Anti-Israel conspiracy theorists try to link Israel with Beirut port blast”, *Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council* (12 Aug 2020), <https://aijac.org.au/fresh-air/anti-israel-conspiracy-theorists-try-to-link-israel-with-beirut-port-blast/> .

³¹<https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;adv=yes;orderBy=customrank;page=0;query=%22hizb%20ut-tahrir%22%20Decade%3A%222000s%22;rec=11;resCount=Default>

the status of the organisation in 2015³² but again decided against proscribing HT Australia. The matter was again raised in 2017 and then-Attorney-General George Brandis said the Government would keep the organisation “carefully under review”. Brandis told media that ASIO was asked to “refresh” its advice on HT Australia but the advice came back that the group did not “meet the threshold”.³³

Each time there have been public calls for Hizb ut-Tahrir Australia to be proscribed, the Attorney-General of the day has publicly imputed that the advice provided by intelligence services is that the criteria for proscription has not been met. This may be so; however, it is impossible to test this given the classified nature of that intelligence. What has not been addressed by successive governments is the continued sense of threat that the Australian Jewish community continues to experience while HT Australia can operate freely in Australia.

AIJAC urges the Victorian Government to look into the Hizb ut-Tahrir threat and consider whether there are additional state legal measures that could be introduced to regulate its activities – or whether there are federal measures that Victoria can request Canberra to consider implementing.

The Challenge Of The Internet

From the 1990s, there has been growing international concern at the role of the internet in providing for the propagation of hateful extremist material and for the facilitation of intimidation, violence and terrorism. From its earliest arrival as a means of mass communication, online technology was seized upon by criminals, extremists and terrorists as an effective, efficient and inexpensive means to further their aims and agendas. AIJAC was involved in the first international conference on Hate on the Internet, in Toronto, Canada, in 1997, (International Symposium on Hate on the Internet, Toronto, Ontario September 2, September 9, 1997, hosted by B’nai Brith Canada) and co-hosted with the Freilich Foundation the first conference on this subject in Australia, “Cyberhate: Bigotry and Prejudice on the Internet” at the Australian Museum, Sydney, in 2000.³⁴

As Raphael Cohen-Almagor of the University of Hull, a noted authority on the impact of the internet on society and politics, noted in his 2021 essay “The End of Self-Regulation: On the Role of Internet Intermediaries in Countering Terror”³⁵:

“Criminals, jihadists and terrorists are working in international cells and rings that contest geographical boundaries and require large resources and international

³² Ben McClellan, “Hizb ut-Tahrir won’t condemn Islamic State death cult”, *Daily Telegraph* (19 February 2015), <https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/nsw/hizb-uttahrir-wont-condemn-islamic-state-death-cult/news-story/032b37b7c4f33c4b7f4b5428b81b5184>.

³³<https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;adv=yes;orderBy=customrank;page=0;query=%22hizb%20ut-tahrir%22;rec=4;resCount=Default>

³⁴ Jones, J. “Offside Online”, *Australia/Israel Review* (December 2000).

³⁵ Cohen-Almagor, R. " The End of Self-Regulation: On the Role of Internet Intermediaries in Countering Terror" in Goldstone, Jack, A. Alimi, Eitan Y. et al. (Eds.). From Territorial Defeat to Global ISIS: Lessons Learned. *NATO Science for Peace and Security Series - E: Human and Societal Dynamics*, Vol. 151 (2021). PP. 215-238. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/348977788_The_End_of_Self-Regulation_On_the_Role_of_Internet_Intermediaries_in_Countering_Terror.

security cooperation to obstruct their activities. Internet intermediaries can and should do far more than what they do to proactively fight online terrorism.”

Given the demonstrated failure of service providers and global platforms to effectively protect vulnerable third parties, there would appear to be a convincing argument for governments to be involved in this arena. Problems which require inter-government cooperation and government instruction include the use by groups such as al-Qaeda and ISIS of information technology to further their political agendas through ongoing logistics for their campaigns and to develop strategic intelligence.³⁶

Cohen-Almagor observed;

“Modern terrorism relies heavily on the Internet. Both modern terrorism and the Internet have common features that promote close relations: they are global and diffuse; they do not necessarily require one center; their operations do not require a large budget; innovation is important to their sustainability; and the operations can be enabled by clandestine means. Terrorists and their abettors and collaborators strive to keep their identity, their modes of operation, and their plans secret. They use advanced technological tools to secure their privacy and anonymity and are quick to adapt to new innovations and exploit any and all technological advantages as means to ends. Clandestine modes of operation generate the funds needed to pursue their goals. Terrorists work in international cells and rings that contest geographical boundaries and that require extensive resources and close cooperation among law-enforcement agencies from different countries to obstruct the terrorists’ activities.”

Regardless of the type of extremist identity to which one ascribes, for an individual seeking solutions to personal crises or complex challenges, validation, rationalisation or reinforcement for their discontent, and association with others who may be on similar journeys or purport to have answers, the internet has provided a variety of possibilities for affiliation to communities, and the dissemination of ideology and guidance as to how to act on one’s belief. So-called “lone wolves” are evidence of the way even single individuals have been able to develop both the mindset and capacity to commit terrorist acts of horrific violence, with the internet usually the source of both the radicalisation and the capabilities to act violently on the beliefs learned there.

Following the exploitation of Facebook by the terrorist who murdered 51 people in mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, Facebook began developing more responsible systems.³⁷ This organisation does not suggest that Facebook or other internet intermediaries would ever consciously wish to promote terror and recognises that in very recent times there have been some reforms which indicate that there is an awareness of the problem. However, the provision of platforms which facilitate the propagation and distribution of material by and for terrorists constitutes, in effect, material support for terrorism.

AIJAC is aware that this is a complex area of policy and law. The technology concerned evolves rapidly, as we have witnessed in the short 30 years it has been part of our lives.

³⁶ Bunt, G. Islam in the Digital Age. London, England: Pluto Press, 2013.

³⁷ Reuters. “Facebook restricts Live feature, White House snubs call for New Zealand shooting response”, (15 May 2019), <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-facebook-extremists-idUSKCN1SL07Q>.

We have seen the development of Australian case law which has affirmed that international online services are covered by The Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth) (in *Jones v Toben* (2002) FCA 1150). The challenge for legislators is to work with international partners to protect Australians while also having legal tools in place as safeguards in the event that international arrangements are not comprehensive.

The ADL argued in its “Protect Plan” of February 2021³⁸ that governments have a duty “to investigate any complicity between social media companies and extremists, and make social media platforms more transparent and accountable for damages, dangerous misinformation ... as well as hate content” and also to develop means to “independently and transparently verify the amount, nature and impact of [extremism] online, as well as the effectiveness of current countermeasures.”

AIJAC supports this argument.

Conclusion

The primary threat of violence Victoria appears to face in terms of the so-called “far right” – a term we prefer not to employ in favour of “ideologically motivated violent extremism” (IMVE) – is an unaffiliated lone attacker inspired by radical right-wing beliefs, akin to the 2019 Christchurch terrorist, the 2011 Norway terrorist, and the mass shooters that have targeted Jews and other minorities across the US, such as the shooter who murdered 10 people at a Buffalo supermarket on May 14. Such attacks are difficult, if not impossible, to prevent precisely because of the great difficulty in obtaining foreknowledge of when or where they might occur.

In terms of organised extreme rights groups like NSN or individuals engaged in racist, hateful conduct and rhetoric online and off, the answer lies primarily in enforcement of existing and pending legislation, primarily strengthened anti-vilification measures. CVE programs may also mitigate the ability for such groups to recruit.

One key to reducing IMVE violence looks to be seeking measures to make social media platforms more transparent and accountable for damage caused by dangerous misinformation and hate content posted by users, because these platforms remain the most important pipeline causing individuals to adopt violent extremist beliefs, and then act on them.

Increased attention directed at the extreme right is certainly warranted, particularly given ASIO’s claim that 40% or more of its caseload now deals with IMVE cases. However, this is partially, as Burgess said, due to the “decision to dedicate more resources to the emerging domestic threat”, which has revealed a trend that was always there rather than one which previously did not exist or was unknown. In terms of violence, Australian Federal Police Commissioner Reece Kershaw said only about 15% of terrorist threats stemmed from IMVE across the whole of Australia – most of the rest appears religiously motivated, primarily

³⁸ Anti Defamation League. “PROTECT Plan to Fight Domestic Terrorism” (Feb 2021), https://www.adl.org/protectplan?fbclid=IwAR1_ZqlovP3X_54bJrWhn_x-nG2obQekbg71K8yY4MPZqCDKJy6AsORII6c.

involving Islamist extremism.³⁹ This reality should not be forgotten amidst the justified concern about the growing threats from the extreme right.

With the likely end of lockdowns and mask mandates, it's possible the ability of the far right to recruit members to specific groups or spread their ideologies will diminish. Victorian security agencies must remain vigilant for the possibility of attacks, but currently the threat to private citizens, public figures and politicians is primarily one of intimidation, vandalism and harassment, and this can be partially mitigated by banning racist gestures and displays, like the Swastika and the Nazi salute, and ensuring legal and financial penalties for such activity.

In terms of the impact on the Jewish community, the welcome adoption of the IHRA working definition of antisemitism by Victoria should be followed by a program for its implementation and operationalisation in multiple, relevant government bodies and agencies to provide a good foundation for combatting antisemitic harassment and intimidation across the IMVE spectrum.

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³⁹ Ben Packham, "Terrorist recruiters are grooming vulnerable children to carry out violent attacks," *The Australian* (25 Oct 2021), <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/nation/terrorist-recruiters-are-grooming-vulnerable-children-to-carry-out-violent-attacks/news-story/1569874c0473f2564389fd77bb8ea404>.