

Research Report for CT Faculty Research Grants

Alex Newhouse, "Investigating Online and Offline Intersections Between Militant Accelerationism and Great Power Relations"

A. Statement of research question and its importance

How does the geopolitics of great powers interact with militant neo-fascists? Over the past twenty years, neo-fascist networks have become increasingly prominent actors in conflicts worldwide. Covering a spectrum of behavior from online harassment and agitation to mass shootings and participation in wars, neo-fascist activity is influential in asymmetric conflict worldwide. Global powers like the United States and Russia have, on occasion, interacted with these actors in their efforts to carry out their geopolitical strategies. Considering the impact of neo-fascist activity on social safety and civic life, it is thus vital to understand why and how great powers interact with neo-fascists, and to assess the impact of these overtures from states to non-state militants.

B. List of collaborators and partners

This project was led by Alex Newhouse, CTEC's Senior Research Fellow for Emerging Technology. CTEC's Senior Research Lead Erica Barbarossa contributed research, writing, and management to the project. The project would not have been possible without the hard work of MIIS graduate students Alisa Tsenko and Marie Mach, who provided research support.

C. Summary of research findings

Great powers tend to provide support—whether covert or overt—to non-state militants when influential actors believe that the activities of those militants can contribute to the geopolitical goals of the states. When deciding whether to support neo-fascist militants, great powers tend to weigh several factors, including the possibility of “spillover” effects of neo-fascist violence, ideological congruence (or incongruence) with extreme-right actors, and the actual effectiveness of these militant groups for achieving “productive” ends for the state.

Since World War II, Russia and the United States have each decided on multiple occasions that the geopolitical benefits of supporting neo-fascist entities outweigh the potential costs. The U.S. primarily gave material and administrative support to neo-fascists during the first two decades of the Cold War, when American intelligence and military leadership were particularly concerned by the possibility of an incursion by the Soviet Union into NATO territory. During this time, these fears convinced leadership that the chaotic, violent, and anti-democratic characteristics of neo-fascists were, in fact, desirable for the purpose of wreaking havoc on a potential Soviet invasion. As a result, the United States and NATO supported decentralized networks of neo-fascists who were trained as “stay behinds,” or forces meant to cause disruption and chaos behind enemy lines. Although no evidence has ever shown a definitive link between the CIA- and NATO-supported stay-behind cells and the wave of far-right terrorism that occurred throughout Europe in the 1960s and 1970s, this support still had cascading impacts. In particular, individuals allegedly trained by this program became influential leaders in contemporary neo-fascist organizations.

Russia, on the other hand, has primarily supported neo-fascists in the post-Soviet era. In contrast with NATO's operations, the Russian government and its proxies have directly encouraged and funded far-right terrorism throughout Europe and North America. The Russian government itself has engaged in both tacit approval and explicit funding operations, most notably during the war with Ukraine, in which it has provided material support for Wagner Group's Rusich militants and allowed the Russian Imperial Movement to operate unimpeded. Russia has also engaged with the transnational neo-fascist ecosystem via Putin's associate Aleksandr Dugin. A hardened neo-fascist himself, Dugin has played an instrumental role in connecting neo-fascist militants, including those in South Ossetia, Ukraine, Russia, the United States, and Western and Central Europe.

Across these cases, one unifying motivation is clear: great powers support neo-fascist militants *because of*, not despite, the militants' ideological commitment to sowing chaos and attacking social infrastructure. This support comes when the state actors believe that they can harness that chaotic violence for their own purposes and run low risks of dealing with the negative consequences themselves. While the United States and NATO eventually abandoned their command of the stay-behind cells, Russia has fully embraced neo-fascist agitation throughout Europe and has continued to tolerate it domestically. Its effectiveness for helping Russia achieve its goals is unclear, but Russia appears willing to support neo-fascist militants as part of its strategy for the foreseeable future.

D. Implications for study and practice of conflict transformation

Contemporary militant neo-fascism is structurally transnational, with networks stretching across borders and connecting various nationalities, ethnolinguistic groups, and ideological currents. The scope of this decentralization is intrinsically tied to the support of great powers like the United States and Russia. Our research shows that the study of contemporary conflict needs to take into account these multi-level, transnational, and decentralized dynamics. It also demonstrates that global politics is inextricably influenced by extreme-right neo-fascism, and that fighting against hate, antisemitism, and fascism is a necessary part of national security.

E. List of publications, performances, media coverage, and other output

As a part of this project, CTEC initiated development on a first-of-its-kind wiki to collect knowledge on neo-fascist entities. The wiki contains open-source information on the history, membership, and interconnections of important neo-fascist organizations who have endorsed accelerationist tactics. This wiki is currently in invite-only status for academics.

CTEC has also produced several publications containing information gathered during this project, including the Dangerous Organizations and Bad Actors series on [CTEC's website](#). A full academic publication, tentatively titled "Dealing With the Devil: Great Power Politics and Apocalyptic Neo-Fascism," is forthcoming. Finally, CTEC has also presented elements of this research at conferences and speaking engagements.