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Political Studies Association (PSA): Greek Politics Specialist Group (GPSG)

Workshop on Political Violence, Terrorism and Extremism in Greece and Europe

Canada Water Library, London. Friday, 20 June 2014

Comparative Panel: Extremism and the State

‘The American Extreme-Right, Racism and Anti-Government Enmity at three historical junctures: Post Civil Rights, Post-9/11 and the Obama Presidency’

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Much recent discussion has focused on the rise of what has been termed the extreme- or far-right¹ in and across Europe, particularly populist anti-EU, anti-immigrant, anti-Roma, racist, Islamophobic and anti-Semitic parties. There has also been much attention and focus on the rise of the extreme-right in the United States. Watching the news from the US, we have seen a number of extreme- right shootings in the past year, including:

- In April 2014, former Klansman and leader of the White Patriot Party, Frazier Glenn Miller, Jr. was arrested for a shooting at the Jewish Community Center and Village Shalom retirement home in Kansas which left three dead.
- On 9 June 2014, Jerad and Amanda Miller shot and killed two police officers at a pizza parlour in Las Vegas and then killed another man at a local Walmart. The Millers, who dies during a confrontation with police, were anti-government activists who had recently been amongst supporters at the Cliven Bundy ranch siege. This siege became a focal point and rallying cry for the extreme-right much like those at the Ruby Ridge home of Randy Weaver and Branch Davidian compound did in the 1990s.

This was predicted and warned about from 2008-9 by the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), Political Research Associates (PRA) and the US Department of Homeland Security (USDHLS), which issued the report

¹ In this presentation, I am using the using the term far-right to describe parliamentary or electoral movements and parties such as those we are seeing today in Europe. The term extreme-right is being used to identify extra-parliamentary movements and groups who operate outside the political system and engage in extra-judicial violence, such as the armed anti-government patriot, white separatist or neo-Nazi groups we are seeing in the US. It is recognized that some can and have occupied both/multiple positions, particularly in Europe, and that both types exist in both contexts, but to different degrees and in different forms. It should be noted that there is a lack of consensus, as well as disciplinary differences, where it comes to definitions and labels. While Political Scientists in Europe tend to use the term extreme-right to describe those deemed ideologically ‘extreme’ within the electoral political spectrum and don’t generally work on extra-parliamentary or anti-state movements (thus little need to distinguish). There are, as this presentation will argue, a lack of electoral parties beyond the traditional mainstream party system and spectrum in the US and thus no clear term used. Sociologists typically use the less pejorative and ideological term far-right to describe both parliamentary/electoral parties and extra-parliamentary and even violent groups in Europe and the US (although other terms such as ‘radical-right’ or ‘populist-right’ are also used in both contexts). These issues will be discussed in the presentation.

Rightwing Extremism: Current Economic and Political Climate Fueling Resurgence in Radicalization and Recruitment in April 2009. In it, they claimed that the economic climate and election of an African-American President provided the conditions for developments not seen since the 1990s, which, with its anti-government Patriot and Militia movements, government sieges like Ruby Ridge and terrorism like the Oklahoma City bombing, could be repeated.² Yet, this has very little to do with parties and developments in Europe. For one thing, none of these American groups or activists are running for political office. Sure, there is the Tea Party, but this is a wing of an established political party fighting for hegemony within it and not generally considered extreme-right. Although its anti-federalism and suspected racism and Islamophobia would make it possibly far-right in Europe, in America it sits on the narrower electoral political spectrum with a large extra-parliamentary right – made up of paramilitaries, white separatists and neo-Nazis - occupying the extremist position outside and even against the electoral system. It would thus be difficult to place an electoral movement or wing of a traditional mainstream party under that banner.

Yes, groups like Golden Dawn can and do occupy both or multiple positions - electoral and street level activism, with the use of extra-judicial violence - but with a few individual exceptions, such as former Klansmen David Duke, there have been no significant national extreme-right candidate or support since Civil Rights, and no party post-war. The depression-era Union Party being the best example. Miller did run for office in North Carolina several times from the 1980s-2010, but was always an unsuccessful fringe candidate and this role stood in stark contrast to his anti-government activism. There have also been individual paleo-conservatives like Pat Buchanan and right-wing libertarians such as Ron Paul, but in spite of views and supporters who would be at home on the far- or even extreme-right, they would not be viewed as such.

In order to understand what is happening now – the convergence of racism and anti-government enmity (which is largely directed at President Obama) - we must return not only to the 1990s as Homeland security suggests, but to the post-civil rights 1970s and 1980s when the extreme-right moved from traditional system supportive activism to paramilitarism, separatism and anti-government activism that peaked in the mid-1990s. With few exceptions, the American extreme-right, dominated historically by the Ku Klux Klan³, had been system supportive politically, ideologically, tactically and strategically. It had defended racist laws, lobbied congress, supported anti-immigrant, racist/segregationist and anti-communist politicians, had members running for elected office and purported to represent and defend white Christian America against threats foreign and domestic. Horrible violence was committed, but in conjunction with electoral campaigning, in defence of laws or under

² United States Department of Homeland Security: Threat Analysis Division, *Rightwing Extremism: Current Economic and Political Climate Fueling Resurgence in Radicalization and Recruitment*. 7 April, 2009, available on the Federation of American Scientists website at www.fas.org/irp/eprint/rightwing.pdf.

³ The Klan has not though been a unified or continuous presence. Founded in the 1865 in the South in the context of Reconstruction following the Civil War, its history can be divided into five eras: 1st. Post-Civil War Reconstruction, 1865-1871; 2nd. Nativist period 1915-1933 (at which point Depression era populists and then fascists dominated); 3rd era. Desegregation/Civil Rights period, 1954-1964; 4th era. David Duke mainstreaming strategy, 1975-1992; 5th era. Paramilitarization and anti-government activism, 1979/1980-1995 (although by 1983, Klan members joined and the organization would be overshadowed by white separatist, neo-Nazi and Christian Identity groups). In terms of organizational unity, there were various Klans: Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, United Klans of America, Imperial Klan and others.

the protection of elected officials and laws. According to the Ku Klux Creed from the anti-segregation and anti-civil rights 3rd era in the 1950s and 1960s:

We, THE ORDER of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan [...] RECOGNISE our relation to the Government of the United States of America, the Supremacy of its Constitution, the Union of States thereunder, and the Constitutional Laws thereof, and we shall be ever devoted to the sublime principles of a pure Americanism and valiant in the defense of its ideals and institutions. [...] WE AVOW THE distinction between the races of mankind as same has been decreed by the creator, and shall ever be true in the faithful maintenance of White Supremacy and will strenuously oppose any compromise thereof in any and all things [...].⁴

The passing of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 and Voting Rights Act in 1965, as well as an FBI COINTELPRO investigation and House Un-American Activities (HUAC) hearings on the *Activities Of Ku Klux Klan Organizations in the United States* from 1965-1967 which produced the report *The Present Day Ku Klux Klan Movement* and declared the organisation ‘un-American’,⁵ were widely seen to represent the loss of white supremacy and the America that the Klan had appointed themselves the defenders of *and* their persecution by the federal government. In response, the movement retreated to the political and geographical wilderness. While much attention focused on David Duke’s electoral campaigns in the 1980s and 1990s (including his 1988 and 1992 Presidential campaigns and successful bid for the Louisiana House in 1989), which was part of the 4th era ‘mainstreaming’ of the Klan. Yet, Duke was an exception to the rule and not only was the Klan ‘mainstream’ in the context of Jim Crow and legal white supremacy, but many of Duke’s fellow Klansmen would reject the mainstream for the margins.

From 1969 throughout the 1970s, more radical Klansmen established new neo-Nazi and white separatist groups – most notably Henry Beach’s Posse Comitatus and Richard Butler’s Aryan Nations - throughout California and the Pacific Northwest. Regions geographically distant from a south now subject to black rights and votes. The late 1970s and early 1980s saw Klansmen trading in their robes and burning crosses for fatigues, guns and compounds, forming paramilitary units such as Miller’s White Patriot Party and Louis Beam Jr.’s Texas Emergency Reserve. These groups, known collectively as the ‘5th era’, rejected political engagement for arms, violence and revolution (in the words of Beam, who would become Aryan Nations’ ambassador, ‘where ballots fail, bullets will prevail’⁶), white supremacy and defensive nationalism and even states’ rights for white separatism, survivalism and compounds, law and order for constitutionalism and vigilantism, whiteness for

⁴Ku Klux Klan, ‘The Ku Klux Creed’, *The American Klansman* (Jan. 1952), p. 14.

⁵ United States Government, *Activities Of Ku Klux Klan Organizations In The United States*, Hearings before the Committee On Un-American Activities, House of Representatives, Eighty-Ninth Congress, First Session, Part 1: Oct. 19, 20-22 and 25, 1965, Part 2: Oct. 26-28 and Nov. 1-4 and 9, 1965; Second Session, Part 3: Jan. 4-7, 11-14 and 28, 1966, Part 4: Feb. 1-4 and 7-11, 1966, Part 5: Feb. 14, 15, 21, 23 and 24, 1966, Sept. 29, July 28, Aug. 24 and Oct. 6, 1965, Jan. 28, 1966; *The Present-Day Ku Klux Klan Movement*, Hearings before the Committee On Un-American Activities, House of Representatives, Ninetieth Congress, First Session, Dec. 11, 1967.

⁶ James Ridgeway, *Blood in the Face: The Ku Klux Klan, Aryan Nations, Nazi Skinheads, and the Rise of the New White Culture* (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 1990), p. 87.

Aryaness, Protestantism for non-American apocalyptic religions such as Christian Identity and in some cases Odinism, and the American government, its many agencies and the political system itself declared the enemy.

Beam's statement about the movement's relationship to America from the mid-1980s, written in a piece titled 'Seditious Conspiracy' while on the run from the police, would stand in stark contrast to the Ku Klux Creed:

Political, economic, religious, and ethnic conditions in the United States have reached the point where patriots are faced with a choice of rebellion or departure. That this is indisputably the case, and further, that the sun has forever set on the American Republic of our Forefathers resulting in the necessity of such choice [sic] being made, is clear upon a collateral deduction that departure ... is a sound method of re-establishing a new constitutional republic.⁷

These groups would expand and dominate the discussion about the extreme-right through the farm crisis of the 1980s – a period which saw growth in the Midwest farm belt and attacks on IRS officials, law enforcement and court houses, as well as high profile murders such as that of DJ Alan Berg by The Order in 1984 - and fill the post-cold war vacuum in the 1990s with their anti-government rhetoric and activism. In the 1990s, the racist, anti-Semitic and anti-government 'Patriot' extreme-right of the 1980s would be joined by the less race-based anti-government militia movement which emerged in and grew in response to government sieges at Ruby Ridge in 1992 and Waco in 1993. The bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City by Gulf War veteran Timothy McVeigh, who claimed it was revenge for Waco, on 19 April 1995 would bring the extreme-right to national and international headlines. In response to the bombing, the government established an FBI counter-terrorism taskforce in the Pacific Northwest to deal with such movements, as well as five Senate sub-committee hearings held immediately after the bombing between May and November 1995. The hearings included: *Combating Domestic Terrorism*, *The Militia Movement in the United States*, *The Nature and Threat of Violent Anti-Government Groups in America*, *The Federal Raid on Ruby Ridge, ID.*, *The Activities of Federal Law Enforcement Agencies Toward the Branch Davidians*.⁸ The latter two of which acknowledged the government's role in extreme-right mobilization (in today's terms 'radicalization'), something that has not been done in response to 9/11, foreign terrorism or in relation to foreign policy. Yet, by this time, many of the organizations that had dominated the period were in decline following convictions, lawsuits, prosecutions, aging leadership and a lack of focus or rationale (except for survivalists and religious ones who had an eye on the millennium).

⁷ Louis Beam Jr., 'Seditious Conspiracy', *Calling Our Nation*, n. 58 (1987), p. 21.

⁸ United States Government, *Combating Domestic Terrorism*, Hearing before the Subcommittee on Crime, of the Committee on the Judiciary, House of Representatives, 104th Congress, First Session, May 3, 1995; *The Militia Movement in the United States*, Hearing before the Subcommittee on Terrorism, Technology and Government Information, of the Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate, 104th Congress, First Session, Sept. 6-8, 12, 14-15, 19-22 and 26, and Oct. 13 and 18-19, 1995; *Nature and Threat of Violent Anti-Government Groups In America*, Hearing before the Subcommittee on Crime of the Committee on the Judiciary, House of Representatives, 104th Congress, First Session, November 2, 1995; United States Government, *The Federal Raid on Ruby Ridge, ID.*, Hearings before the Subcommittee on Terrorism, Technology and Government Information, of the Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate, 104th Congress, First Session, June 15, 1995; *Activities of Federal Law Enforcement Agencies Toward the Branch Davidians*, Joint Hearings before the Subcommittee on Crime, of the Committee on the Judiciary, House of Representatives and the Subcommittee on National Security, International Affairs, and Criminal Justice, of the Committee on Government Reform and Oversight, 104th Congress, First Session, Part 1: July 19-21 and 24, 1995, Part 2: July 25-27, 1995, Part 3: July 28 and 31, and August 1, 1995.

9/11 provided what many on the extreme-right saw as an opportunity for relevance. While most on the mainstream right were rallying the troops through calls of patriotism and national unity, various Klan groups, Aryan Nations and others saw another movement that hated America, Israel and Jews. In response, they issued statements of congratulations and calls for alliances, which stands in stark contrast to the European far- and extreme-right and US groups that could be termed far-right such as Stop Islamization of America (which protested the so-called 'Ground Zero Mosque'). These went unnoticed by both an American government focused on Islam, the war on terror and Iraq and an al Qaeda pre-occupied by their own larger geo-political conflict.⁹

As the Homeland Security report warned, the election of an African American President and recession would provide the ideal conditions for a revival of extreme-right, and an opportunity for the combination of racism and anti-government enmity and ideologies developed over the past three decades to re-emerge. According to the SPLC, this period has seen a 56% rise in hate groups – neo-confederates, neo-Nazis and white separatists – to 939 since 2000, and an 813% rise in anti-government groups from 149 in 2008 to 1,360 in 2012. This was an all-time high, but dropped slightly in 2013.¹⁰ There has also been a stark rise in anti-immigrant nativist hate groups (the Minutemen being the most well-known internationally). These perhaps have the closest overlap with the mainstream right and, with the exception of American nativism and the focus on Mexicans, overlap with elements of the European anti-immigrant movement.

Both the SPLC and Homeland Security see the spectre of the 90s, a point reiterated in the 2013 SPLC report, when the convergence of traditional hate groups and anti-government began in the 1970s peaked. Although, in line with historical state approaches to extremism, like the 1990s following Oklahoma, the focus has been far more about threats to the government and issues of violence and sedition, as opposed to racism. This was even, ironically true during the 1960s Klan investigations and hearings when violence, criminality and being 'un-American' were the focus. While the reasons for this in the 1960s may have had something to do with separating the Klan from the mainstream and legal racism they supported and defended, and focusing attention away from it as both were being exorcised from the body politic. In the current context, it may be that America has constructed a post-race discourse where racism is both not frequently acknowledged *and* accusations of racism are viewed as tantamount to racism. It may also be that it allows the government to focus on the political-national aspect of the activism and threats and allows critics of the right to make the link through anti-government ideology between the extreme-right and the far- and more mainstream right. This is something conservatives have criticized (as well as the lack of attention paid by

⁹ George Michael, *The Enemy of My Enemy: The Alarming Convergence of Militant Islam and the Extreme Right* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2007); Aaron Winter, 'My Enemies Must Be Friends: The American Extreme Right, Conspiracy Theory, Islam and the Middle East', *Conspiracy Theories in the Middle East and the United States: A Comparative Approach*, eds, M. Reinkowski and M. Butter (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014), pp. 35-58.

¹⁰ David Holthouse, 'The Year in Hate: Number of Hate Groups Tops 900', *Intelligence Report*, Spring 2009, www.splcenter.org/intel/intelreport/article.jsp?aid=1027; Mark Potok, 'The Year in Hate and Extremism', *Intelligence Report*, Spring 2013, # 149, <http://www.splcenter.org/home/2013/spring/the-year-in-hate-and-extremism>; See also: <http://www.splcenter.org/what-we-do/hate-and-extremism>

USDHLS to 'left-wing extremists') about the USDHLS report, thus making the link themselves.¹¹ In spite of concern and debate about overlap between different sectors of the right or the implication that there may be, the focus of the USDHLS report and much press reporting on violent incident has been on the so-called 'lone wolf' perpetrator. The lone wolf is a perpetrator who, by definition, removes any affiliation or responsibility from any movement, organization, culture or whiteness itself. An option that Muslims don't get.

I guess the question is where does the extreme-right in America stand now? Well, according to the SPLC, the anti-government extreme-right's numbers are dropping slightly, but we are seeing a cluster if not an increase in high profile violent incidents committed by so-called lone wolves (sometimes with ties to wider movements, such as the case with Miller). On the far- but still mainstream right, the Tea Party is given last rights every time a candidate is defeated and revived in the press when another wins, such as in the case Republican House Majority leader Eric Cantor's primary loss to Tea Party Candidate Dave Bratt in Virginia last week (June 2014). What this says for Europe, and Greece and Golden Dawn specifically, well, the US electoral far-right doesn't tend to cosy up to foreigners or neo-Nazis and on the extreme-right, the anti-government wing is pretty domestically focused and the neo-Nazis would be unlikely to consider Greeks white enough.

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¹¹ Ginger Thompson, Extremist Report Draws Criticism; Prompts Apology', *The New York Times: The Caucus*, 16 April 2009, <http://thecaucus.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/04/16/extremist-report-draws-criticism-prompts-apology/>