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Kommentare ( 0 )

## Patterns of far right and anti-Muslim mobilisation in the United Kingdom



This is the eleventh article in our series *Trouble on the Far-Right*. For more information on the series, please click [here](#).

by Graham Macklin

Far right and anti-Muslim politics in Britain have become increasingly fragmented. The British National Party (BNP), once the leading far right party, has largely collapsed. During the 2010 general election the BNP polled only 1.9% of the vote and was overshadowed by the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), a right-wing, anti-immigration populist party unencumbered by the BNP's debilitating historical baggage. Thereafter, the BNP leadership descended into demoralization, bitter recrimination and factional rivalry, hastening the departure of its activist base, the collapse of its membership and leading, ultimately, to the expulsion of its chairman, Nick Griffin, as the party continued its further descent to political irrelevance. The BNP appears '**finished**' as a political force, its '**quest for legitimacy**' at an end.

Whilst the limited local *electoral* challenge of the BNP has been extinguished, that posed by the populist right-wing politics of UKIP has fared little better. Despite polling 12.9% in the 2015 general election, UKIP failed to make a meaningful national breakthrough, although this was arguably due to the vagaries of the British electoral system rather than a lack of support. Leading figures have since been publicly at loggerheads with one another whilst the party itself has seemingly lost momentum, struggling to be heard within the 'Brexit' campaign which is dominated by mainstream Conservative Party voices.

Within this overarching context of right-wing political failure, the English Defence League (EDL), an anti-Muslim street-based movement which since 2009 has campaigned against 'militant Islam', has also stagnated and fragmented. Whilst many activists were motivated by a belief that they were on the '**front line**' in a 'clash of civilizations' the organization went into decline from 2011 onwards, due in part to a combination of infighting (Busher, [chapter 5](#)) and hard line policing strategies which took much of the '**buzz**' out of its demonstrations. The group suffered a grievous blow in October 2013 when its founder 'Tommy Robinson' **resigned**, claiming that street demonstrations were 'no longer productive' and that 'fringe elements' had increasingly gained a foothold within the group. His departure, motivated also by his own on-going legal difficulties, stalled what little momentum the EDL had recouped in the aftermath of the killing of **Lee Rigby**, a serving soldier murdered outside Woolwich barracks, London, by two Islamist terrorists. The killing generated an unparalleled, though brief, spike in the number of protests staged by groups across Britain.

### Fragmented mobilization – strength or weakness?

Electoral collapse and movement decline have produced an increasingly complex and diverse constellation of far right, anti-minority and anti-

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## TWITTER FEED

Today, @macklin\_gd looks at patterns of far right and anti-Muslim mobilisation in the United Kingdom <https://t.co/K28ZDjOJKa> #UK #UKIP #BNP

11. April 2016, 9:47 from Twitter Web Client

Film maker Angélique Kourounis about her documentary "Golden Dawn. A Personal Affair" <https://t.co/oHwgEylqRI> #Greece #GoldenDawn #racism

8. April 2016, 10:07 from Twitter Web Client

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Muslim groups whose organizational structures and patterns of activism are continuing to evolve. Though the EDL continues to exist it has been joined on the anti-Muslim hinterland by a kaleidoscopic array of like-minded groupuscules. Many of these 'groups' are in fact little more than flags of convenience for disparate clusters of activists, structurally disenfranchised by the fragmentation of the EDL but still networked through the dense web of personal and social media ties that underpins the **anti-Muslim protest movement**. They enable activists from different groups, localities and tendencies, to come together as 'affiliates' under a common 'banner', often just for a one-off protest in a particular geographical location or on a particular issue. Such temporary and permeable 'structures' blur the lines of activity between groups, especially at the grassroots where demonstrators from one group are often interchangeable with those of another – a hybridity that has been increasingly evident in both the anti-Muslim and far right street movements.

Within a fragmented scene the porous and polyvalent nature of anti-Muslim mobilisation, wherein 'group' loyalties and identities are less fixed, has helped obviate the organizational entropy engulfing political parties like the BNP whose regimented, sectarian boundaries preclude co-operation between ostensibly like-minded groups resulting in that party continuing to wither. Whilst political mobilisation within the anti-Muslim scene has continued to devolve downwards to a local level (though the remnants of the EDL still hold the occasional 'national' demonstration) its organizational evolution suggests a continued inner coherence and resilience to the movement.

Functioning as a 'network of networks', a microcosm of the transnational 'counter-jihad' movement, such decentralized organizational activity enables the activists who comprise this 'scene' to continue mobilizing on a regular basis. Indeed, whilst large 'set piece' demonstrations might be increasingly hard for activists to stage, small, local demonstrations involving handfuls of militants are held week after week across Britain. These have been disruptive and, moreover, financially draining for local authorities and police forces who spend vast sums of public money policing them in an 'age of austerity'.

One consequence of the changing structural dynamics of the anti-Muslim movement set in motion by the EDL's disintegration as a 'national' organization has been the development of an increasingly militant 'local' scene which, as one **recent report** observed, is becoming increasingly violent. The North West Infidels (NWI) and the South East Alliance (SEA) are, at present, the two most structurally viable organisations to have emerged from the profusion of groups spawned by the decaying EDL. Notably, in seeking to establish themselves both groups have sought to '**outbid**' others within the wider anti-Muslim milieu with whom they are in competition for limited financial and human resources. This competition has fuelled processes of ideological radicalization, leading both groups to (re)define themselves as ostensibly far right *groupuscules*. Tactically, both groups have also pursued increasingly confrontational strategies with political opponents, staging provocative and increasingly violent demonstrations in towns like **Liverpool** and **Dover**.

This increased militancy of these 'Infidel' groups has provided the broader context for the revitalization of older **violent** grouplets including the National Front and British Movement, founded in 1967 and 1968 respectively. It has also generated groups like National Action, a small, youth-focused, national socialist group which has come under official scrutiny for holding 'self-defence' **training camps** in the Brecon Beacons. Its activists have engaged in ever-more provocative antics including one protest in Newcastle ahead of Holocaust Memorial Day, during which they displayed banners reading '**Hitler was Right**'. Whilst the group's own demonstrations have been vastly

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outnumbered, the broader societal impact of their militancy is reflected in the jailing of one activist on its periphery for an attempted **racist murder**.

## Transnational networks

Whilst far right and anti-Muslim campaigns are often localized in their focus – mobilization converging upon specific towns like **Rotherham** and **Rochdale** over ‘Muslim grooming’ or, increasingly, the arrival of Syrian refugees – the groups themselves are embedded within broader transnational networks. Far right and anti-Muslim transnational ‘networks’ are not, and nor have they ever been, monolithic entities, however. They are multiple, variegated and constantly evolving; sometimes overlapping with one another, sometimes not.

Anti-Muslim groups are increasingly utilizing the ‘counter-jihad’ network as a focus for mobilization – Tommy Robinson’s internationalized activities being a case in point. Robinson’s return to activist politics in 2016, following a spell in jail for mortgage fraud, highlighted his wider networking within the broader ‘counter-jihad’ movement. Having spoken at PEGIDA rallies in **Utrecht**, Holland, and **Dresden**, Germany, and attended a rally in **Prague** addressed by Czech President Milos Zeman, in part to foster a greater degree of coordination between such groups, Robinson sought to mobilise activists behind a local franchise of the PEGIDA ‘brand’. In his autobiography he states that its example of ‘calm, measured and mature’ protests offered the opportunity ‘to create something more mainstream’ in Britain, though its **launch**, at one of several coordinated European-wide rallies, gained a small turnout.

Far right groups are also exploiting the opportunities provided by increasingly globalized political and counter-cultural networks. Transnational networks have been an integral part of far right activism for decades, often combining the personal and the political. Former BNP chairman Nick Griffin, ousted from the party he had led since 1999, has used his brief tenure as an MEP as a springboard for reinventing himself as an activist on the international far right stage. Under the banner of the Alliance for Peace and Freedom, an international ‘third position’ network with ideological roots and personal connections traceable to the early 1980s, Griffin has emerged in the vanguard of far right activists vocally defending Putin’s **Russia** and Bashar al-Assad’s Baathist regime in **Syria**; a country Griffin has visited several times. Whilst the ideological bedfellows might be new, the novelty of such alignments are not; finding their echo in Griffin’s earlier declaration of ‘**the new alliance**’ between Britain’s far right, Khomeini’s Iran, Gaddafi’s Libya and Farrakhan’s Nation of Islam in 1988.

Patterns of transnational diffusion of ideas and tactics are not of course a one-way street. Conflicts abroad intersect with and impact upon domestic extremist activity, serving as a catalyst for further militant activity. Whilst attention is focused, understandably, upon Islamist groups, far right ‘foreign fighters’ have also gained the skills and experience that could, under certain circumstance, be translated into the domestic action. Unlike their **Scandinavian counterparts**, British far right activists, are not known to be serving with the Azov Battalion, a ‘**neo-Nazi**’ brigade fighting Russian separatists in Ukraine. However, internationalized groupuscules like the ‘Misanthropic Division’, active within Britain’s far right milieu, utilize the battalion’s symbology as a means of mobilizing and indeed valourising ‘militant’ activity in a scene already awash with militarized, survivalist, rhetoric. Another notable feature of many far right demonstrations and neo-Nazi gigs in recent years has been the presence of a cluster of Narodowe Odrodzenie Polski (National Rebirth of Poland) **activists** living in Britain whose presence bolsters the neo-Nazi scene’s increased combativeness and connectivity.


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## ARCHIV

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Such immigration brings with it further security challenges for the monitoring of the far right and mitigating the impact it might have upon 'community cohesion'. This was underlined by **Pavlo Lapshyn**, a Ukrainian student on a work placement in Britain, who murdered an 82-year-old Muslim man within days of arriving in the country and then detonated IEDs outside three West Midlands mosques, actions that would, undoubtedly, have had more serious ramifications had Lapshyn been a more proficient bomb-maker. Again such patterns are not 'new' – the importance of *émigré* activists for the development of the British far right represents a process of diffusion traceable to the aftermath of the Bolshevik revolution in 1917.

## Conclusion

Whilst the far right and anti-Muslim 'scenes' are currently politically marginal they will not disappear. Indeed, this is not the first time in recent history that the milieu has drastically contracted only to reemerge years later. The legacy of this wave of anti-Muslim militancy is impossible to predict but, given its durability, is likely to include a lasting, sustainable, networked social movement which, even if it lapses into 'abeyance' for several years, could still provide future activists with a pool of ideological and organizational resources upon which they can draw should the 'scene' – in its broader sense – be reactivated as a result of a future, and as yet unforeseen, 'catalytic event' such as that which originally led to the mobilization of the EDL in 2009. Current patterns of fragmented mobilization and networking at a local and transnational level should be seen in this context; as providing the necessary wherewithal through which such modes of militant opinion and action will sustain and survive into the future.

**Graham Macklin** is a Research Lecturer/Senior Lecturer in History at Teesside University where he researches historic and contemporary manifestations of fascist and extreme right-wing politics and activism in Britain, North America and Europe; as well aspects of political violence and terrorism. He is currently completing a major research monograph on the history of **White Racial Nationalism in Britain**. He co-edits the '**Routledge Studies in Fascism and the Far Right**' book series.

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 Tags: Britain, British National Party, EDL, English Defence League, militancy, Narodowe Odrodzenie Polski, North West Infidels, South East Alliance, UK, UKIP, United Kingdom

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