



INTELBRIEF: GAME NOT OVER: AN ASSESSMENT OF WHITE SUPREMACIST ONLINE GAMING

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Players sit in front of their computers at the computer game festival DreamHack in Leipzig, Germany, Friday, Jan. 13, 2017. (AP Photo/Jens Meyer)

Bottom Line Up Front

- Violent extremists have long used online games, with a captive audience of 1.8 billion people, as a mechanism to recruit new members and offer alternative narratives to distant audiences.
- White supremacist groups also have a long history of creating games to further dehumanize enemies and encourage acts of violence against minority groups.
- Violent white supremacist groups such as the Atomwaffen Division (AWD) have used common gaming Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) applications to communicate.
- With most of the world at home and online due to the pandemic, white supremacists see a unique opportunity to elevate their brands, expand their finances, grow their group-size, and encourage real-world violence.

Gaming culture, which includes a captive audience of approximately 1.8 billion people worldwide, has provided avenues for a broad range of extremists to recruit new members, finance activities, propagate hate-filled narratives, and exchange operational tradecraft. The use of games to entice at-risk audiences is not new, nor is it associated with a particular strain of terrorist group. Terrorist groups, [violent extremists](#), and misogynists have not only infiltrated mainstream gaming, but these actors have created their own games or adapted popular games to widen the pool of potential new members. The 2013 Edward Snowden leak highlighted that the UK and US governments, since at least 2007, were concerned that terrorists were using games to plot attacks and move money. Later, in 2018, the Financial Action Task Force, an inter-governmental watchdog focused on money laundering and terrorism financing, released a report on ‘Financing of Recruitment for Terrorist Purposes,’ which noted that terrorist groups have been using video game technology in recruitment and training efforts. More than a decade ago, al-Qaeda’s media wing modified a game created by a California company called ‘Quest for Saddam’ and rebranded it ‘Quest for Bush.’ In the al-Qaeda game, game players navigated missions that would conclude with a battle against the former U.S. President. Like al-

Qaeda, Islamic State leaders altered the well-known game, *Grand Theft Auto*, and rebranded it ‘Clanging of the Swords.’

Similar to Salafi-jihadist groups, white supremacist extremists have a history of using games to promulgate their hate-filled ideology. In 2002, the neo-Nazi National Alliance group (through its label Resistance Records) created a first-person shooter game called ‘Ethnic Cleansing’ where players engage in a race-war targeting minorities. One year later, the National Alliance released a game called ‘White Law,’ the goal of which was to create a world devoid of minorities. While these games were short-lived, gaming culture’s right-wing reactionary movement erupted in 2014 with what would become known as ‘Gamergate.’ Gamergate’s reactionary followers billed their rise and vicious online attack of female game developer, Zoe Quinn, as a response to perceived liberalism, which would erode white male dominance in the gaming world.

The networks, tactics, and ideologies popularized in Gamergate constitute a persistent threat to the gaming world. Quinn received numerous death threats and was the subject of doxing attacks orchestrated on freedom boards like 4Chan. In 2018, ProPublica investigative reporting detailed how the popular gaming community chat application, Discord, was leveraged by the neo-Nazi group [Atomwaffen](#) and other white supremacists to communicate bomb-making manuals, plot violent acts at the Unite the Right rally, and praise the murder of Blaze Bernstein by a white supremacist. Before Discord shut these communications down in late February 2018, Atomwaffen members exchanged more than 250,000 messages. In 2019, the scope of the threat became more pronounced when white supremacists were identified on Roblox, an online gaming platform with more than 100 million users. Specifically, the Proud Boys, a chauvinist fascist group that promotes violence, used Roblox as a platform to recruit new members and promote its ideology of toxic masculinity.

With most of the world trapped at home due COVID-19 pandemic, recruiters for [white supremacist groups](#) have a captive audience to seduce. Gaming has increased

significantly during COVID-19 as new members join the online gaming world. Over a one week period in late March, 4.3 million video games were sold worldwide, an astonishing 63% increase over the previous week. One new development is the possible increase in crypto-gaming users during COVID-19. In order to play crypto-games, online users must have access to cryptocurrency. Most crypto-games are based on the Ethereum blockchain and according to recent statistics, crypto-game play has increased nearly 50% in March, with now more than 400,000 active users. This trend is of concern for two reasons. First, as noted above, white supremacists have long used games to push forward their agenda. Second, Richard Spencer, a well-known white nationalist called Bitcoin ‘the currency of the far-right.’ Cryptocurrency has become an important form of exchange for white supremacists since payment processing and credit card companies stopped servicing them. The confluence of COVID-19, cryptocurrency, and gaming may allow white supremacists to ramp up their recruitment, rhetoric, financing, and operational efforts that, if left unchecked by law enforcement, could put lives at risk.

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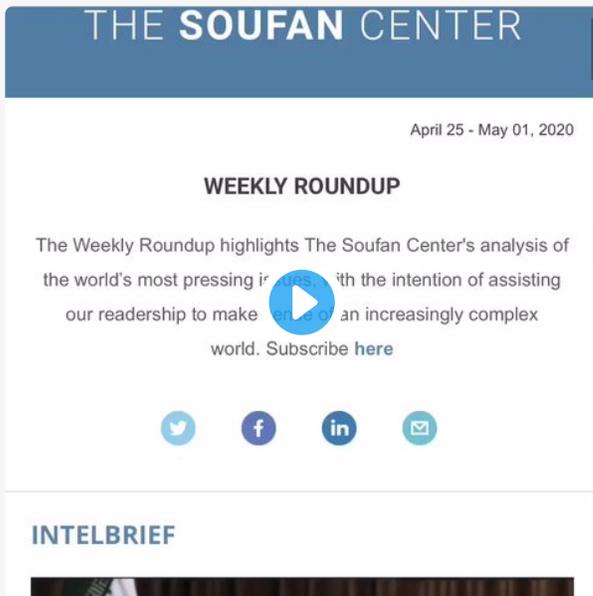
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