



a podcast by the Southern Poverty Law Center

Baseless Final Script PART THREE

Rinaldo Nazzaro: Tell us a little bit about yourself.

Speaker 66: I grew up here in Brooklyn.

Speaker 23: I'm from Texas, born and raised.

Speaker 35: I live in an apartment in Saskatchewan.

Speaker 46: I'm from the New England area.

Speaker 53: I'm from England.

Speaker 72: Alabama.

Speaker 46: Boston originally.

Speaker 101: Delaware.

Speaker 93: Germany.

Speaker 110: Huron County, Michigan

Speaker 112: I live in Northeast Indiana.

Speaker 118: I grew up in Belfast.

Speaker 13: California.

Geraldine Moriba: *Sounds Like Hate* is a new podcast series from the Southern Poverty Law Center. I'm Geraldine Moriba.

Jamila Paksima: And I'm Jamila Paksima.

Geraldine Moriba: This is part three of Baseless.

Ryan Thorpe: I was also called to a meeting with the national security unit of the RCMP, which is the federal police force in Canada, and they, you know, warned me that there were death threats against me, that that was something I needed to be careful about.

Jamila Paksima: This first season is about how some people become extremists, and how some of them disengage from a life of hatred.

Ryan Thorpe: The RCMP wouldn't tell me, that was actually quite frustrating. I was like, is this someone locally making threats? How seriously should I take these? Eventually, the Base released a propaganda video where myself, alongside a few other journalists were explicitly threatened. One of the investigators DM'd me on Twitter and just said, "Hey, I don't know if you've seen this, but this video exists." And then at the very end, in quick succession, it flashes my photograph.

Jamila Paksima: When we left part two, Ryan Thorpe, the reporter with the Winnipeg Free Press had broken his story about Patrik Matthews, the former Canadian reservist who had fled Canada and was likely hiding in one of the Base's underground cells in the US.

Ryan Thorpe: These people are trying to rattle the cages of journalists, the few journalists that actually cover this stuff. But that's not how things work in liberal democratic societies. You know, the press has the right to report on these people. I think this type of journalism is important. So, I'm certainly not going to shy away from doing it just 'cause neo-nazis are trying to, you know, make me scared.

Jamila Paksima: While some members of the Base were trying to scare reporter Thorpe.

Rinaldo Nazzaro: I mean, you probably heard about what happened in Winnipeg.

Jamila Paksima: Others were trying to help Mathews, a fugitive from the law.

Dakov: Yeah, I was kind of involved in that. I was supposed to go there with them.

Jamila Paksima: Like this alleged member of the Canadian Armed Forces who calls himself Dakov.

Dakov: But, you know, logistics and stuff, renting cars. I'm still glad he was able to get out even without our help, though.

Geraldine Moriba: As Patrick Mathews evaded arrest, these secret audio recordings were being made inside the Base's "vetting room." Rinaldo Nazzaro, the leader of the Base, continued to interview new recruits from his home in Russia, sometimes while his wife and children were there too.

Rinaldo Nazzaro: My kids are waking up, but I don't, I mean, as long as the background noise doesn't bother you.

Geraldine Moriba: On the call with Dakov, Nazzaro blamed the Canadian reporter for exposing the Base.

Rinaldo Nazzaro: He went in, got the information he needed, and he got out before he was exposed. And, uh, so in a, in a way, it actually speaks, uh, to the strength of our security, I think, you know, in that sense.

Dakov: Because he was only able to do, like, so much damage, like, he only got one guy. Like he infiltrated the main chat only was able to get one guy.

Jamila Paksima: Dakov says he learned about the Base through Facist Forge, an internet forum.

Rinaldo Nazzaro: And are you on Fascist Forge?

Dakov: Yeah, yeah, I was.

Rinaldo Nazzaro: What's your username there?

Dakov: Same as this one: Dakov.

Rinaldo Nazzaro: Okay. Okay, now; you haven't even gone to... you haven't even gone to basic training yet?

Dakov: No, not yet. I was supposed to go this September but they reassigned me.

Jamila Paksima: Dakov is typical of applicants to the Base. He's young, aspires to be in an elite military program, makes music on SoundCloud, and he's a racist.

Dakov: Oh, yeah, when I first came to Canada and realized I was, like, one of the few white people in my fifth-grade class, that was, that was the first time I ever felt white, I guess you can say, 'cause when you live in a place that's everyone's the same as you, you're already in a way connected with it. You don't notice it. But when you're in a place, in a foreign place, and you're surrounded by all types of foreigners, your identity feels like it's in danger.

Jamila Paksima: He had applied months earlier, but Nazzaro wanted to hold off on Dakov's vetting process until there were at least three members to form his Canadian cell. Here Dakov explains his radicalization journey, while dropping clues about other white supremacists with names and affiliations.

Rinaldo Nazzaro: We don't have anyone in your area, that hasn't changed yet.

Dakov: So I found a few guys that I talked to were willing to join, one guy named Peck. Some of you might know him. He lives, like, two hour drive away from me. I told him, like, "Dude, I'd be down to meet you and we can talk about the Base if you're interested in joining." And he said, "Yeah, I'd be down." There's one other guy, also close to him. And he claims he has a Ruger Mini. Says he's, uh, getting his restricted PAL license so he can, uh, purchase ARs. And I've talked to that guy, too. And he's also close in my area. After they've passed, obvious, like, e-mail vetting and, like, voice vetting too, I can go and meet them and, like, give you the full report.

Rinaldo Nazzaro: Just tell us a little bit, like, about yourself, 'cause we don't really know you, including myself.

Dakov: I got into fascism around, back when I was like fourteen, fifteen. A few months later, I got in contact with this guy named Heinrich from AW. You probably, you probably seen him in the ProPublica documentary. He was the guy that's called Sam Woodward, the "one man gay Jew wrecking crew." And he, uh, after I got in contact with him, I also got in contact with Lion. And Lion added me to the main AW chat where I met, uh, all the, all the boys. And afterwards I've just, uh, Crocodil and, uh, Kamir. Fuck it. He doesn't like to be called Kamir anymore. But I mean, at this point, of this is confidential anyways. But he told me that because I'm in Canada, it complicates things, so I might as well just talk to Dark Foreigner and join Northern Order, which I did. In regards to Sonnenkrieg Division, there's been a sort of a resurgence in the group and it's partly been because Apollo appointed me as, like, temporary leader of SKD and we've been getting a lot of, like, guys and.

Rinaldo Nazzaro: What are you gonna bring to the Base? Uh, you know, to kind of reciprocate?

Dakov: Not, much, other than, like, technical skills, such as, uhm, I did work on planes awhile back. I don't know if that's of any interest. I also did take two years of university grade physics. I know that'll come, like, handy down the road when it comes to, you know, ballistic type shit, uh, handmade weapons, stuff like that.

Rinaldo Nazzaro: What is your, uh, religious belief system?

Dakov: Slavic paganism and, uh, O9A. I wouldn't really call O9A, like, a specific, like, religious system as more of a way of, uh, life, more of a, uh, path you go down.

Jamila Paksima: The Canadian Armed Forces have opened an investigation on this 19 year old who says he lives in Ottawa, Canada. It turns out, Dakov has been in contact with a few American members of the Base for a while, including one who calls himself Merlin Ovwyrd, and says he's from San Bernardino, California. Another one, called Matthias, was on the call too. His real name is Matthew Baccari, as reported by the BBC. He lives near Los Angeles and is a founder of Facist Forge.

Matthew Baccari: I, I like Dakov.

Jamila Paksima: Here's Baccari weighing in on whether to accept Dakov.

Matthew Baccari: And if he does go overseas, obviously, he's gonna be away for a while. When you're deployed, you're not active. You really can't have any communication with us, so.

Geraldine Moriba: We are chasing truth. Trying to understand the motivations of violent white supremacists and the people who want to be just like them.

Jamila Paksima: In this episode, we ask why these American domestic terrorists are not being investigated with the same rigor as foreign terrorists. And, as groups, like the Base, plot violence and national destabilization, are their accelerationist goals and desires to take advantage of lawlessness leading us closer to a civil war?

Geraldine Moriba: We asked the D-Lab at UC Berkeley to use their machine learning program to forensically analyze hate speech in the 83 hours of secret recordings we obtained from the Base's vetting room.

Chris Kennedy: For this project, we're creating a ruler for hate speech.

Geraldine Moriba: Chris Kennedy is a biostatistician.

Chris Kennedy: They could be encouraging genocide or dehumanization of a vulnerable population. Others may be promoting stereotypes or promoting bias that might lead to more extreme hate speech in the future.

Geraldine Moriba: This analytical tool was built on content collected from YouTube, Twitter, and Reddit. On these recordings they found mostly moderate scores, punctuated by extremely genocidal and dehumanizing hate speech.

Speaker 40: What really needs to happen right now is about 200,000 true patriots need to march up into fucking, into the capitol building and just kill everybody fucking in it and then turn around and say, “Look, we’re done. This is what’s going to happen from this point on because our, our forefathers gave us the keys to the kingdom and told us what we needed to do.”

Claudia Natalia von Vacano: The next step is to see what’s the connection between hate speech and hate acts.

Geraldine Moriba: Claudia Natalia von Vacano also works at the D-Lab at UC Berkeley.

Claudia Natalia von Vacano: My sense is that the phenomena at play in the recordings that you shared with us is not hate speech...

Geraldine Moriba: She’s the executive director of social science and digital humanities.

Claudia Natalia von Vacano: But rather it’s the mobilization of extreme far-right movement that may also lead to terrorism. There were things that were mentioned that had to do with being armed, organizing, convening in person, meeting at a certain locality. All of those things are actions related to this sort of bigger plot of terrorism.

Geraldine Moriba: Was there any terroristic language and discourse that stood out to you in this context?

Claudia Natalia von Vacano: Certainly there was a lot of mention of, first of all, organizing, very structured organizing, taking very seriously that ideology, wanting to learn and be rigorous about the ideology, which is, in my opinion, a eugenics, uhm, racial supremacy ideology that’s tied to a sense of protectionism. And then there were, uh, mentions of contributions of ammunition and contributions of weapons.

Geraldine Moriba: There were phrases like, “We’re definitely looking for people who can contribute, as well as get something out of it,” or, “You did an awesome job. It came out awesome. That was so cool.” These aren’t hateful comments. What does that indicate?

Claudia Natalia von Vacano: Camaraderie, a sense of belonging, a sense of support, a sense of “you are one of us.” That positive sentiment language is not surprising. I think the sort of frightening part is the juxtaposition of that extremely supportive language with egging on for, “Oh, you know, we can do this violent thing.”

Geraldine Moriba: In other words, these are in-group conversations among like-minded men. They didn’t use hate speech often, but when they did they spoke about the genocidal, apocalyptic collapse of America. More often though, we found men combing through their past, discussing their personal failures and private fears. A great deal of what they say points to the very basic human desire to belong, to belong to something bigger than themselves. What’s most disturbing about these terrorists is how this festering need for belonging drove them to extremes.

Rinaldo Nazzaro: What, what is your interest in us?

Speaker 113: Hmmm. As far as what I want to get out from the Base, I would say, basically, comradeship from people who I can be completely and totally honest with.

Speaker 92: There is nobody around here, at all, that really believes the way I believe. And I'm dealing with all, you know, just people I don't connect with all day. And it'd be good to have a gro... a network of people that I can rely on.

Speaker 6: I'll be honest, it's the most uplifting stuff. Like, honestly, like, nothing really has given me purpose as much as national socialism.

Speaker 109: I was in the Air Force for a while, uhm, didn't really get along with that, uh, but ended up moving down here, uhm, about five years ago trying to get closer to my kids, see them, somewhat, but, uhm, hasn't really panned out too well. And then I contacted you guys, because I was, like, I'm kind of tired of being by myself and tired of feeling, like, I don't belong. I'm, I'm by myself, dude. I feel like I'm by myself, so.

Speaker 36: I, I'm tired of being, you know, nobody out here. You know, I want to commit myself to my duty. You know, my ancestral duty here and, and whatever I can do to chip in on that. There's nobody else out here who's actually committed to action. You know, most people out here are more concerned with just rattling around and making no progress whatsoever. You know, I, I just want to do something and I want to be with my brothers, you know?

Ali Winston: Uh, my name's Ali Winston. I'm an independent reporter and have, uh, mostly focused on criminal justice and issues of surveillance and civil liberties.

Jamila Paksima: Winston has been on this beat for 14 years, most recently working on investigations with the BBC and ProPublica. He says Nazzaro has real ties to intelligence agencies.

Ali Winston: He was a former FBI intelligence analyst who then went on to run a private security firm, a pri... intelligence contractor that, worked, that did work for the, uh, Department of Defense and the Department of Homeland Security. We were able to verify his company's work with the Pentagon and his former status with the FBI through pretty extensive sourcing, uhm, which I can't discuss for reasons of confidentiality, but this is a big reason why the Federal Bureau of Investigation is so concerned about him.

Rinaldo Nazzaro: Uh, I did a few things, but mainly, um...

Jamila Paksima: This is how Nazzaro explains his background.

Rinaldo Nazzaro: ...mainly, uhm, counter-terrorism, counter-insurgency. That was, you know, a hefty portion of what I did. You know, I was mostly, like, military intelligence work. And I do have an intelligence background. I never hid that. You know, as a def, defense contractor, I mentioned that in the chat before. I've mentioned to people that my background is in intelligence. You know, it's, like, I guess, an open secret, at best. I mean, it's not like I'm trying to hide, but I also don't try, try to advertise it.

Jamila Paksima: If this is true, the question is: How can someone with these extremist views pass US intelligence agency clearances at the highest level? And how can Nazzaro be stopped today if he's running the Base from Russia?

Ali Winston: Well, the United States doesn't currently have an extradition treaty with Russia. We were able to determine that Rinaldo Nazzaro had attended a security conference, uhm, as a potential vendor in Russia hosted by the, uh, Interior Ministry, Interior Security Ministry. We also know that the bureau is investigating whether or not he has official ties to Russian security services. Uhm, it's a pretty safe conclusion to ascertain from those two points of information that he's being investigated as an active measure. And an active measure is a term of our intelligence community's use for, uhm, an organization or an entity that's being run as an intelligence asset or as an influence operation by a foreign power.

Jamila Paksima: The potential here is that perhaps the Russian government is supporting him.

Ali Winston: Tacitly or overtly? That's what the American authorities and authorities in other countries are currently looking into.

Jamila Paksima: What do you think?

Ali Winston: I think that the facts we've put out there speak for themselves and to speculate any further than that would be irresponsible.

Rinaldo Nazzaro: If they also think that I have connections, that I'm trying to claim that I have connections to Russian intelligence, that I'm gonna help them, you know, as like a Russian agent or something like that. You know, I mean, this I've never fucking said anything like that. Anytime people have jokingly or occasionally asked me outright, "Do I have connections to Russian intelligence?" I've always denied it.

Geraldine Moriba: Another question we're trying to answer on this podcast is whether white supremacy groups are being taken seriously enough, given the volatility of 2020. Because the men on these calls are certainly watching president Trump, his name was brought up 69 times, and was mentioned in 18 percent of all conversations.

Speaker 63: Well, I think I started out just like anybody else. You know, I started out kind of right wing, like Republican, sort of like a, you know, Trump supporter, some kind of civ nat, sort of, I guess. And just kind of followed the path. I uh.. you know got more into race realism. And it just kind of woke me up to a lot of the disgusting things that are going on that are affecting my people.

Geraldine Moriba: These domestic terrorists agreed having Trump in office furthered their mission.

Speaker 86: Uh, it's a kind of like we're climbing a ladder. We, we, we hit a rung and we hit another rung on a ladder. And so I think this next election will be just interesting. And depending if Trump wins and if the left, depending on how bad they freak out, how bad they, uh, riot and things like that, uh, there's potential for some, you know, mass kind of lawlessness and things like that.

Geraldine Moriba: For some of them Trump didn't go far enough.

Speaker 5: I mean, one of the things that it was great, in the sense, that it got Trump... Trump elected 'cause he's a... he's a clown, pretty much, you know, he's like the best shabbos goy ever. But, like, the way that they were able to bring up the question of, like, race and identity was incredibly effective.

Speaker 116: Initially, we all thought he would be this huge racist, this accelerationist. But it became very clear almost immediately that he wasn't who, uh, everyone thought he was.

Geraldine Moriba: On January 14, 2020, warrants were issued for the arrest of seven Base members. The FBI had uncovered evidence several members were plotting a violent attack on crowds in Richmond, Virginia. The arrests happened ahead of a pro-gun rally planned in front of the state house on lobby day. Governor Ralph Northam declared a state of emergency in an attempt to cut off an armed confrontation.

CBS Baltimore: Federal prosecutors say these men are dangerous, that they were recruited online by an underground white supremacist group that vowed to kill Jewish Americans and African-Americans.

Geraldine Moriba: On January 16, one member was arrested. The next day, three more were picked up by authorities. Then President Donald Trump weighed in ahead of the gun rights rally. He tweeted in defense of the right to bear arms in Virginia. He said the state was under a very serious attack.

(Ringing)

Brett Barrouquere: Hello.

Geraldine Moriba: So, I'm calling you to check in and find out what you're seeing on the ground.

Geraldine Moriba: Brett Barrouquere, a Southern Poverty Law Center investigator, was there.

Brett Barrouquere: Well, I'm here in Richmond at the state capital, and we've got, uh, almost all pro-gun. Some Revolutionary War-era style US flags with 13 stars, Trump flags. Lots of people in camouflage carrying guns. Lots of signs. I see some people from the Three Percent militia's out here, uh, some oath keepers, some Proud Boys..

(USA! USA! USA!)

Geraldine Moriba: While an estimated 20,000 protestors, many of them armed, marched in Richmond in defense of their gun rights...

Brett Barrouquere: It's almost, I don't wanna say all white, but it is definitely heavily, heavily, heavily a white crowd.

Geraldine Moriba: Base members everywhere else were scrambling to figure out the details of the arrests.

But former FBI agent Mike German wasn't surprised.

Mike German: A lot of criminals are not very smart.

Geraldine Moriba: He's more concerned about why these crimes persist.

Mike German: That's how a lot of criminals get caught.

Geraldine Moriba: Why is a group like the Base especially dangerous at this particular moment in American history?

Mike German: I'm, I'm not sure the Base is more dangerous than any other groups. These far-right and white supremacist groups have been a lethal threat in the United States for as long as there has been a United States. The only thing different from the way these groups operate is that they have the rhetorical support from the president of the United States and a free hand given to them by law enforcement. Uh, and that is extremely dangerous. Anytime the group believes that they have the support of government and, particularly, that law enforcement is looking the other way, they can engage in much more dangerous activity. The idea that far-right militants could come into a town, commit public violence, and leave, and even use that public violence to promote themselves in their next venture into the next town where they commit public violence, gives them a broader opportunity to recruit more widely, uh, to attract a more violent element and to test their tactics in a way that, that will make them much more dangerous.

(Ringing)

Jamila Paksima: Hello, this is Jamila.

Senator Durbin Assistant: I have Senator Durbin on the line now.

Senator Dick Durbin: Hello, Dick Durbin.

Jamila Paksima: Good morning, Senator Durbin.

Jamila Paksima: Senator Durbin of Illinois is one of the lead sponsors who introduced a domestic terrorism prevention bill.

Senator Dick Durbin: Uh, we should be keeping track of this...

Jamila Paksima: With the dramatic rise in white supremacist violence and death, there is a serious concern no official law enforcement agency in the US is monitoring white supremacists and other domestic terrorists close enough. This bill calls for the authorization of dedicated terrorism offices within the Department of Homeland Security, the FBI, and the Department of Justice.

Senator Dick Durbin: We want law enforcement agencies, federal law enforcement agencies, to assess domestic terrorism, including the particular threat of violent, white supremacist, uh, focus their resources on the most significant domestic terrorism threats, and provide training and resources to local, state, and federal government agencies. People have forgotten that we're just, uh, literally, a year away from that horrible incident that occurred in El Paso, uh, where this man set out, this 21-year-old white supremacist set out to kill Hispanics. Twenty-three people were killed and 23 were injured. It was the deadliest attack on Hispanic population in modern American history.

Jamila Paksima: So, how will the provisions in the domestic terrorism bill prevent a lone wolf or a small-cell attack on innocent victims like those in El Paso?

Senator Dick Durbin: If it works, the people in law enforcement, they're doing, uh, surveillance, collecting evidence, they'll start picking up elements, uh, that, uh, should lead them to conclude that there's white supremacist or nationalist group behind, uh, some person's, uh, political agenda, uh, and their motivation and start connecting the dots. That's what it's about. Uh, but they first have to be aware of the fact that this is a major challenge and a major problem. And it is, it leads to violence and certainly leads to death in the extreme.

Jamila Paksima: How can we change culture within the FBI and law enforcement community to make it a priority?

Senator Dick Durbin: It starts at the top. It starts with the president, commander in chief, and the climate that's being created. Uh, and I think it eventually plays its way down through law enforcement agencies, whether it's the Department of Justice or FBI. You know, the president sets the tone. The president expresses the values. Law enforcement, not, uh, exclusively, but to the large extent, is going to be, uh, uh, motivated by that, uh, kind of, uh, call to action.

Jamila Paksima: Opponents of this bill say there are already statutes to prosecute domestic terrorists, and this bill's designation of "racially motivated, violent extremists," raises serious civil rights and liberties concerns.

Mike German: Instead of producing the data, the FBI manipulated its categories, combining white supremacists with black identity extremists into this racially motivated violence category.

Geraldine Moriba: Former FBI agent German says instead of crushing extremists like the Base, this designation could be used to target protestors or activists, especially when it comes to property damage.

Mike German: So again, now that you saw both sides of the ledger, you wouldn't necessarily know which cases were white supremacists and which were targeting black people. Uh, and likewise, they, they combined anti-government militias, far-right militias with, uh, anarchist groups in an anti-government group, uh, to mask how they were using their race resources. Uh, but I think what, what is also problematic is, is the government's actions, uh, in this manner of masking white supremacist violence tends to reinforce that the beliefs within the white supremacist community, that the government's actually on their side.

Geraldine Moriba: Well, if the idea of designating domestic groups as terrorists is problematic, what do you recommend instead?

Mike German: I recommend that the government focus on actual acts of violence by, by everyone. And once we understand that and understand how their violence actually works, we can better address it. And once we can better inform state and local law enforcement about how this activity occurs and where, they can be better trained and prepared to address that crime as well.

Jamilla Paksima: For all the talk about tight OPSEC and security, the Base was infiltrated again. This time by an FBI agent who'd been inside this terrorist group for five months, starting July 2019. The agency uncovered their violent plans by tracking activities of specific members, bugging audio, and recording video at their homes. Here is who was arrested.

Geraldine Moriba: In Wisconsin, a federal criminal complaint was filed against 22 year old Yousef Omar Barasneh, aka Joseph, for conspiracy and vandalism: spray painting anti-Semitic statements, swastikas, and the Base's logo on a Racine synagogue.

Jenny Tasse: It's painful to talk to someone that, that has so much hate...

Geraldine Moriba: Jenny Tasse is the director of the Jewish Community Relations Council of the Milwaukee Jewish Federation.

Geraldine Moriba: How surprised were you to find out that Yousef has Jordanian roots and he's a member of a neo-nazi, white supremacy group?

Jenny Tasse: I, I can't read someone's heart. I don't know this gentleman and individual, but I do know that he's 22 years old and, uhm, you know, at such a young age to have such, so much hate in, in the heart. But I think what's even more important is the healing process, right? I don't think that any Jewish person would say, "We want him to spend as many years in jail and then come out and, and have the same hateful heart." We want that individual to have growth.

Geraldine Moriba: If you could speak to Barasneh today, what would you say to him?

Jenny Tasse: Geraldine, that's a hard question, uhm.

Geraldine Moriba: And he might be listening. What do you want him to know?

Jenny Tasse: There's so much more happiness in the world when you, when you really decide to love thy neighbor as is, is maybe overutilized as that term is. But it doesn't just mean to love your neighbor or to see your neighbor, but really understand their experiences. And so any hateful rhetoric you might have been taught over the years, the anti-Semitic things that may have been taught to you are not true.

Geraldine Moriba: In Georgia, three members of a cell were arrested: Jacob Kaderli, 19, aka "Pestilence"; Luke Austin Lane, 21, aka "The Militant Buddhist, or "TMB"; and Michael Helterbrand, 25, aka, "Helter Skelter." They were all charged with conspiracy to commit murder of a married couple believed to be anti-fascists.

Jamila Paksima: In Maryland, federal prosecutors arrested another trio. They were planning the armed confrontation at the gun rally in Richmond, Virginia: William Garfield Bilbrough the 4th, 19, aka "Izen"; Brian Mark Lemley, Jr., 33, a former cavalry scout in the US Army, aka "Can't Go Back; and missing Canadian Reservist Patrik Jordan Mathews, 27, aka "Jimmy" and "Dave." The two Americans were charged with harboring an undocumented immigrant and with transporting firearms and ammunition with the intent to commit a felony. Canadian Mathews received additional charges for being an undocumented immigrant in possession of a firearm and for the destruction of evidence, including cell phones. Allegedly, it happened as the FBI raided their apartment.

Ryan Thorpe: Patrik Mathews...

Jamila Paksima: Reporter Thorpe has more details.

Ryan Thorpe: ...allegedly built a machine gun, essentially, and began plotting to go down to this public rally and open up fire on the crowd.

Jamila Paksima: So, what is the goal in trying to shoot up people who are out there fighting for their rights to bear arms?

Ryan Thorpe: My suspicion is that it's to essentially frame the left. I mean, these people want to see increased political polarization on both sides of the spectrum. Why would some folks that are on the extreme right shoot up a Second Amendment rally when they're pro Second Amendment? Uhm, but it's, they're interested in indiscriminate attacks. You know, they just want to do things to foment anger and potential political violence in society. Uhm, so at, at that point, it doesn't really matter if your target is the left or the right. I think all those people, uhm, are enemies to them. They just, they want to do whatever they can to increase that political polarization and make it more likely that violence will break out, that things will devolve into civil war.

Jamila Paksima: Altogether, in 2020, seven men from the Base have been arrested. Thorpe attended Mathews's bail hearing.

Ryan Thorpe: So, the prosecution, uh, laid out their argument for why, uhm, he should not be granted bail, why he needed to be detained in custody, uhm, essentially saying that he was a violent individual motivated by a violent worldview. And the defense put forth a First Amendment, uh, defense that essentially Mathews had every right in the United States to hold odious views. The prosecution countered that, you know, Mathews wasn't arrested because he held odious views, but because he was expressing these things while also taking concrete steps towards perpetrating violence.

Jamila Paksima: This was Mathews's response to the evidence presented.

Ryan Thorpe: At one point, when the judge, either the judge or the prosecution was reading into the court record, uhm, the statement, the quote from his propaganda video that he had recorded that the FBI obtained, where he says, you know, "derail some fucking trains, poison some water supplies, kill some people." And as this is being read into the court record, Mathews is just leaning back in his chair laughing.

Jamila Paksima: These trials are expected to begin in 2021. It's still not clear what each cell knew about each other's actions. Remember, plausible deniability is a key part of their strategy. On September 21, 2020, the domestic terrorism bill passed with an overriding majority vote in the Democratic House.

Congressman Brad Schneider: These groups are not getting weaker. They are not heading off into the sun sunset. They are organizing and we have to organize as well.

Jamila Paksima: Congressman Brad Schneider, the co-sponsor, says he and Senator Durbin have been working hard to find support for two-and-a-half years to advance this bill.

Congressman Brad Schneider: We are seeing these, these, movements growing; uh, the "boogaloo" movement that is, uh, uh, gaining support across the country. We are in a very dangerous time and every American in all aspects of our government need to be very diligent in protecting our communities, protecting our citizens. When people try to play politics around it, it is not good for, uh, any of us and it puts the nation at risk.

Jamila Paksima: We spoke with Senator Durbin's office and they said they didn't expect this bill to pass a Republican majority Senate. What would it take to get Majority Leader Mitch McConnell to bring it to the floor for a vote?

Congressman Brad Schneider: At the end of the day, Mitch McConnell does what Mitch McConnell thinks is in his personal political interests. So, uh, every American should rise up. And my colleague, many of my colleagues on, on the other side of the aisle have rightly said there's no room for, for these groups in their party, in their party, but too many people have remained silent. Uh, I think it was Edmund Burke who said, "The only thing that's necessary for evil to succeed is for good people to remain silent."

Megan Squire: There's some evidence. Yeah. The group that I am looking at on Telegram, for example, wasn't even created until May of 2020, just five months later. So even though it was damaged, it's not destroyed.

Geraldine Moriba: Megan Squire is a computer scientist at Elon University. She uses data mining to study far-right, radical extremism. She was monitoring the Base after the arrests, as members shut their accounts and others bounced between internet platforms, trying to keep their conversations going.

Geraldine Moriba: So, even with these arrests, they're continuing to put up propaganda and look for recruits.

Megan Squire: Yeah, for sure. I, the one that I saw, uhm, was several just, uh, videos, several photographs of them at, uh, a George Floyd protest up in, I believe, it's Michigan. So, they're definitely still producing propaganda. It looks like about five guys in that film.

Geraldine Moriba: Does de-platforming work?

Megan Squire: Well, it depends what your goal is. If your goal is to disrupt the network and to stop these guys from hassling normal users on the platform, then yes, it absolutely does work for that. In a place where, where normal people are trying to have conversations and share normal people ideas, we can not have neo-nazis, you know, trying to radicalize people and, and hassle them and calling them names and things like that. So, uhm, to me, I think it's a great idea to get them moved into their own little, sort of, world.

Geraldine Moriba: You've said that these extremist groups are moving towards a less centralized, darker version of the web that'll make it even harder to locate them. Uhm, and you described it as trying to hit mercury with a hammer. Is that in some way already happening?

Megan Squire: Yeah. They're moving to places that are encrypted, in places that are harder to track. We're not quite there yet. They're still operating on mainstream platforms because that is where they go to recruit and, uh, propagandize and harass others. Eventually there will be, uhm, you know, uncensorable domains, uncensorable websites and things like that. That's where the technology is headed. But right now, that's still not happening.

Geraldine Moriba: Doesn't that make it more difficult to stop?

Megan Squire: It is, and I think that's what's concerning to a lot of folks that do this kind of work and this kind of research is trying to understand that structure, trying to understand the new methods of disrupting a network when it splinters like that into smaller and smaller pieces. I think that's, that is the challenge.

Geraldine Moriba: Have you seen any evidence that Rinaldo Nazzaro is still online and active, since the FBI arrests?

Megan Squire: No, I haven't seen any evidence of that.

Jamila Paksima: Nazzaro's internet silence doesn't mean the Base has gone away.

Cassie Miller: But we do see them still organizing online. Uhm, you know, they still have a Telegram channel. They still have somewhere around 300 subscribers.

Jamila Paksima: More concerning to Miller of the Southern Poverty Law Center is evidence the group is continuing to hold paramilitary training meetups.

Cassie Miller: They are putting out propaganda videos that show them out engaging in paramilitary training. So, it is still active, uhm, in a much smaller form. But there are people still out there who are, who are using the name “the Base” and who are hoping to make new recruits.

Jamila Paksima: So this plan to have all these individual cells, I’m wondering if it’s going to work in this prosecution because each of the members were individually charged and they weren’t charged as a group. So, did the strategy work?

Cassie Miller: So, the arrest do achieve a few things: you know, for one, it does disrupt the network. Uhm, it stops, uhm, some potentially violent things from happening. Uhm, it increases the paranoia of members, you know, who now have proof that the group was infiltrated and it’ll likely discourage new people from joining the group. But there’s some, there are some drawbacks. And I think that’s, that’s kind of worth acknowledging. You know, in some ways, uhm, arresting members of the group can further radicalize people who are part of the Base, who, or who are part of the larger white power movement. Uhm, and that’s because this is an anti-government group that believes that the state needs to be torn down in order to build fascism. And so when the state comes after them, it inflames their paranoia and it really affirms their beliefs that they’re at war with the government. People who adopt extremist views shouldn’t just be punished. They should be rehabilitated. We really need to actively work to address what draws people into far-right extremism in the first place.

Jamila Paksima: Before the arrests, Nazzaro spoke about infiltrating an even larger group.

Rinaldo Nazzaro: ‘Cause that’s gonna be the first level defense or offense against the insurgents.

Jamila Paksima: He mentions it here on this 2018 podcast.

Rinaldo Nazzaro: I would say something like infiltrating local, state and local law enforcement, to me, would be the most obviously beneficial thing for any type of insurgency. Uhm, from, like, a higher strategic perspective, from, like, a policy perspective, if it was really possible to infiltrate and influence policy at the highest levels, then most likely you wouldn’t even need a violent insurgency.

Jamila Paksima: It’s believed Nazzaro still operates out of his apartment in St. Petersburg, Russia. He is safe there, for now.

Rinaldo Nazzaro: I always said to myself, like, look, I’m gonna, I’m gonna, I’m gonna start this thing and I’m gonna give it a go. And, I mean, if, if, if at the end of all this it ends up just being me alone in the chat room, then I guess that’s it. (*Hearty Laughter*) Then I know it’s time to close up shop, you know what I mean? But until that happens, you know, as long as I have, like, one other person there, you know, I’m gonna keep, keep going.

Jamila Paksima: Yousef Omar Barasneh from Wisconsin is the first in the sweep of arrests to plead guilty to his charges. And Michael John Helterbrand from Georgia was caught with a shank, a homemade knife, found in his prison cell.

Ecologist: Uh, through economic sabotage such as bombings, arson...

Geraldine Moriba: Remember the Ecologist? Before the arrests, he brought three-to-four college friends to the Base. Well, he was doxxed by anti-fascists. And Erik, the 17 year old in Michigan.

Erik: I’ve gotten probably five or six solid guys that are, uh, definitely gonna help out and move up and join the community.

Geraldine Moriba: After all the planning for a Base meetup on his mother's property, it's not clear it ever happened.

Jamila Paksima: As for Dakov, the other Canadian recruit, Nazzaro and the men in the vetting room worried about his OPSEC, but ultimately decided to let him into the Base.

Rinaldo Nazzaro: Uh, he'd be in a much better position to, to, to join us when he gets done with his deployment. Look, I just want to make sure that he's actually gonna do stuff, I guess, you know, more, more than anything else. Alright, so, let's, let's just hold him to his word just as far as, like, bringing someone else, then he'll be good to go.

Geraldine Moriba: We contacted iFunny and Wire for a statement about the use of their platforms by domestic terrorists. Only Wire responded. The CEO said: "Wire unequivocally denounces the use of its platform by neo-nazis and all other extremist groups." So, we wrote back to Wire and asked whether the Base was disabled at any point. They still haven't responded.

Jamila Paksima: We also reached out to four divisions of the US Armed Forces to share our findings. A significant number of applicants in the recordings from the Base were active duty servicemen or had formerly served. None of the divisions responded to our request for a comment.

Rinaldo Nazzaro: For a second, I was kind of questioning, like, do I want to go to, potentially go to prison? I mean, I seriously feel, still feel like I'm looking at that. I don't know what could happen next. I mean, I never saw this coming. So, you know, what it comes down to is, like, my kids, really, that's my, my number one inspiration. I, you know, I gotta look at them in the eyes everyday and, and that makes me ask. That's my motivation. Hey, you know, I, I wanna, I'm, I'm trying to do something for these future generations, you know, my kids included.

Jamila Paksima: Here's what we'd like you to take away: All that happens to us, our misfortunes, our embarrassments, our mistakes; all these things shape our lives. Unless we work at recognizing our common values, we're making each other our biggest enemies.

Geraldine Moriba: Look, there's a lot of exaggeration and misinformation on these recordings, but there's also truth. What these terrorists choose to share and what they lie about tells us what they wish for and what they hope will happen. So, we listen, and we'll continue to listen. These are complicated stories about people who hold onto false histories and terroristic ideologies — and draw boundaries that are skin deep.

Jamila Paksima: If anyone on these recordings happens to be somebody you might know, or if you have a tip you'd like us to investigate, send an email to soundslikehate@protonmail.ch. And if anyone you know has experienced a hate incident or crime, please contact the appropriate local authority or elected official. You can also document what happened at splcenter.org/reporthathe.

Geraldine Moriba: This is *Sounds Like Hate*, an independent audio documentary brought to you by the Southern Poverty Law Center. Additional funding comes from the Ring Foundation.

Jamila Paksima: Our sound engineer is Randy Scott Carroll.

Geraldine Moriba: Our computer scientist is Will Crichton.

Jamila Paksima: Our associate producer is Jordan Gass-Poore'.

Geraldine Moriba: Our music is composed by Warner Meadows.

Jamila Paksima: *Sounds Like Hate* is produced by Until 20 Productions. If you find this podcast interesting, then subscribe to find out when season two is released. I'm Jamila Paksima.

Geraldine Moriba: And I'm Geraldine Moriba. Remember to rate and review. It really helps. Thank you for listening.