

CONFESSIONS OF EXTREMISTS

The threat is growing. Former far-right radicals speak up before it's too late.

A FILM BY
AUDREY GLOAGUEN

Produced by
Dominique Tibi

90' & 52'

ROCHE
PRODUCTIONS

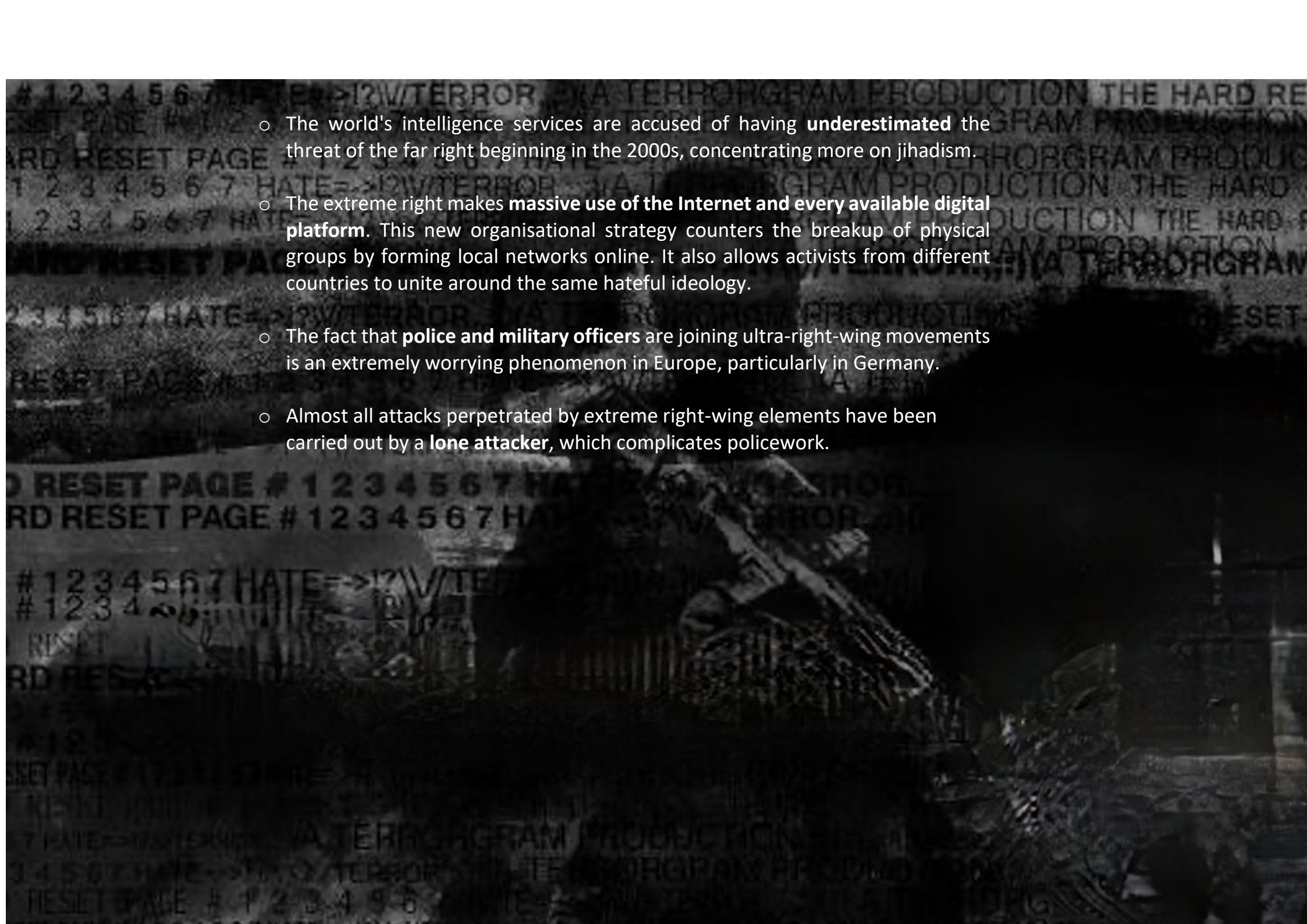
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PITCH

As the threat of ultra-right-wing terrorism grows worldwide, former extremists reveal details of how they were led to violence in order to prevent others from turning to hatred and committing attacks. Giving a voice to reformed extremists who have renounced their radical convictions and want to stop the spiral of radicalisation, this international investigation draws us into the web of new ultra-right-wing terrorism, exploring transnational networks, online radicalisation and the polarisation of Western societies.

CONTEXT

- Intelligence services now consider the extreme right to be **the main threat to our democracies**.
- According to the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Committee, extreme right-wing violence **increased by 320%** worldwide between 2015 and 2020.
- **Arrests for ultra-right-wing terrorism** have been rising steadily since 2011. According to the latest Europol report published on developing terrorist threats in the European Union, 5 people were arrested on such grounds in 2011, 34 in 2014, 44 in 2018 and 64 in 2021.
- In recent years, a number of **mass murders** have been perpetrated in Western countries in the name of ultra-right-wing ideas: shooting in a shop in Jacksonville (USA) in July 2023 [3 dead]; attack on a community centre in Paris in December 2023 [3 dead]; an attack on an LGBT bar in Bratislava (Slovakia) in October 2022 [2 dead]; a massacre perpetrated by a white supremacist in Buffalo (USA) in May 2022 [10 dead] ; attacks in Hanau (Germany) in February 2020; a massacre targeting Mexican immigrants in El Paso (United States) in August 2019 [23 dead]; mosque shootings in Christchurch (New Zealand) in March 2019 [51 dead]; a synagogue in Pittsburgh (United States) in October 2018 [11 dead]; an African-American church in Charleston in 2015 [9 dead].

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- The world's intelligence services are accused of having **underestimated** the threat of the far right beginning in the 2000s, concentrating more on jihadism.
 - The extreme right makes **massive use of the Internet and every available digital platform**. This new organisational strategy counters the breakup of physical groups by forming local networks online. It also allows activists from different countries to unite around the same hateful ideology.
 - The fact that **police and military officers** are joining ultra-right-wing movements is an extremely worrying phenomenon in Europe, particularly in Germany.
 - Almost all attacks perpetrated by extreme right-wing elements have been carried out by a **lone attacker**, which complicates policework.

STATEMENT OF INTENT

To begin this investigation, I reviewed **content published in ultra-right-wing groups on the Telegram network**. I needed to understand the hateful content that is flooding these networks. In just a few clicks, I became a “White Angel” and entered the dark depths of humanity.

I read comments tinged with "Lol-racism", saw the use of Nazi symbols, and discovered virtual friendships, transnational connections and hatred

I discovered groups set up to glorify ultra-right-wing terrorists who made history with their heinous crimes. It took me less than a minute to stumble across the video of the Christchurch massacre that left 51 people dead at two mosques in New Zealand on 15 March 2019

For two days I scrolled and scrolled and scrolled. I saw a video of a man's throat being slit, then photos showing the weapons used by the Buffalo killer (a supermarket shooting perpetrated by Payton Gendron and targeting mainly African Americans - 10 dead, 14 May 2022) commented on with heart-shaped smileys. There were also photos of the terrorist in a file that could be consulted at as if you were leafing through a nice family photo album.

I remember feeling alone, isolated and depressed the following week. I couldn't sleep and felt deeply unwell. I didn't immediately make the connection. Then I realised that the hateful messaging had insidiously seeped into my veins.

Scrolling for two days isn't much. I thought about ultra-right-wing extremists who spend months or even years posting or viewing this kind of content. I understood that these networks were filled with "ordinary" people and that it was "easy" **to fall into a spiral of hatred.**

As I continued my research, I also discovered that some of these activists had managed to break out of the spiral. Through a **process of de-radicalisation**, they had finally broken with their violent ideologies and plans.

This investigation will be built around testimonials from these former extremists. We join them to learn about what led them to violence. We **get inside the heads of the would-be terrorists they were at the time**.

For these former extremists, speaking out is also a way of defusing **the bomb represented by the growing ultra-right-wing presence in Europe and the United States**. They want to tell the story of who they were, **so that others can avoid falling into the traps set by the extreme right and prevent more calls for violence and terrorism, thus avoiding new hate crimes, attacks or shootings**. Bringing this danger to everyone's attention is one way of hoping to stop the machine from spinning out of control.

But we need to act quickly because the **threat is growing**. Arrests for ultra-right-wing terrorism have been rising steadily since 2011. According to the latest Europol report on developing terrorist threats in the European Union, five people were arrested on such charges in 2011, 34 in 2014, 44 in 2018 and 64 in 2021

Narrative thread: testimonials from former extremists

The film revolves around **an investigation based on testimonials from former ultra-right-wing activists who have left their radical beliefs behind**. We join them to learn about **what led them to violence**. We get **inside the heads of the would-be terrorists they were at the time**. What **deep-seated ideas** led them to adopt an ideology that calls for mass murder? How were convinced that they needed to kill in the name of racial supremacy? How did they plan to incite civil war to fight the so-called "great replacement"? **What connections – whether virtual or real – did they have with other activists who shared the same radical beliefs?**

Given the worldwide nature of this contemporary threat, **these "reformed" former extremists come from across Europe and the United States.** They come from different backgrounds, but all adhered to the same ideology of hatred, racism and violence. **Some have only recently renounced their beliefs** and have witnessed first-hand the transformation of ultra-right-wing terrorism in recent years. **Others have been active for years in awareness-raising and de-radicalisation,** remaining in close contact with the realities on the ground, whose history and changes they know very well.

Writing and directing ULTRA-RIGHT-WING TERRORISM: FORMER EXTREMISTS is a continuation of my documentary work investigating social issues. One of my films, TAMPONS, OUR INTIMATE ENEMY, was an international investigation that revealed the toxicity of the components of tampons, a product so familiar to women, for the first time. When I went on to make THE GHOSTS OF PETROL and investigated abandoned wells around the world, I was determined to expose the oil industry's culpable negligence.

By interviewing former extreme right-wing militants who used violent or terrorist methods and who have renounced their ideology, I hope to understand the mechanisms which led them to violence and decipher the mysteries of contemporary ultra-right-wing terrorism. To tell the story is to have the power to stop this mad spiral.

Audrey Gloaguen



VIOLENCE OBJECTIVELY

AUDREY GLOAGUEN - DIRECTOR

After working as an investigative journalist for fifteen years, Audrey Gloaguen became a filmmaker in 2013. She has directed several documentaries, including *The Ghosts of Oil* (Best Director Award - FIPADOC 2023) and *Tampon, Our Closest Enemy* (Best Feature Documentary - California Women's Film Festival Los Angeles 2018). She has published her first novel, *Semia*, with Gallimard in the Série Noire collection in March 2022. Today, she devotes herself to directing documentary and fiction, as well as writing her second novel.

Documentaries

***The Ghosts of Oil* – 2023**

Documentary – 70 mn – France 5
Screenwriter and Director
Production : Dreamway productions
Best Director Award - FIPADOC 2023

***In Pain You Shall Give Birth* – 2022**

Documentary – 60 mn – France 2
Screenwriter and Director
Production : Capa

***Incest, Let's Justice Be Done* – 2019**

Documentary – 70 mn – France 5
Screenwriter and Director
Production : Dreamway productions

***Tampon, Our Closest Enemy* – 2017**

Documentary – 70 mn – France 5
Screenwriter and Director
Production : Dreamway productions
Best Feature Documentary - California Women's Film Festival Los Angeles 2018

Litterature :

***SEMIA (novel)*– 2022**

Gallimard – Serie Noire
Prix du Polar Sud-Ouest (Lire en Poche 2023)
Prix du premier roman (Penmarc'h 2023)
Polar en séries (Quai du Polar 2022)
1001 Feuilles noires (Lamballe 2022)
Plaidoiries pour un polar (Dijon 2022)
Prix du Polar Etudiant (Limoges 2022)

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