

Christchurch massacre royal commission must investigate the 'Five Eyes'

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By Richard Bardon

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If the New Zealand government really wants to uncover how the 15 March mosque shootings in Christchurch were allowed to happen, the terms of reference of its royal commission must allow investigators to look beyond just New Zealand's own law enforcement and intelligence agencies to those of its allies in the "Five Eyes" alliance—the USA, the UK, Canada and Australia. The question the commission must answer is this: given the Five Eyes' awesome capability to collect, store and analyse communications virtually worldwide (especially those of their own and each other's citizens), and their purported recent focus on right-wing extremists, how is it that they missed Australian self-proclaimed ethno-nationalist, white supremacist terrorist Brenton Tarrant, whose suspicious movements around Europe, repeated contacts with white-supremacist groups, and statements of homicidal intent on web forums should have raised all manner of red flags? Or, given the Five Eyes intelligence agencies' history of orchestrating terrorism both at home and abroad, did some faction within NZ's Security Intelligence Service (SIS) and/ or its sister agencies know of Tarrant all along, but let him operate freely for their own shadowy purposes, which allowed him to commit his atrocity?

In announcing the royal commission on 25 March, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said that it "will look at the actions of the SIS, GCSB [Government Communications Security Bureau], Police, Customs, Immigration, and any other relevant government departments or agencies. ... There will be a focus on whether our intelligence community was concentrating its resources appropriately, and whether there were any reports that could or should have alerted them to this attack." In fact, many such reports have already surfaced.

In 2011, at the age of 20, Tarrant inherited \$500,000 from his father, who, reportedly suffering from a terminal illness, had committed suicide the year before. According to a 73-page "manifesto" he posted online before commencing his attack, Tarrant then made enough money speculating in cryptocurrency to quit his job as a personal trainer in Grafton, NSW and travel Australia and the world more or less continuously since 2012. He visited many places, but spent most of his time in Europe. At 8:13 PM London time on 15 March, barely 18 hours after Tarrant's arrest, the *Independent* was able to report that he "is believed to have met extreme right-wing groups during a visit to Europe two years ago, according to security sources". This suggests that Tarrant was already known to the security services of one or more nations, since for such information to emerge so soon almost certainly means it was retrieved from an existing database—which is to say, by 2017 Tarrant presumably was either under surveillance himself, or had been identified as a contact of people who were.

The Australian reported 18 March that European intelligence agencies tracing Tarrant's ramblings across the continent had discovered an obsession with the Balkans region and its long history of battles between various Muslim political entities (mainly the Ottoman Empire) and so-called "Christian Europe". The *Australian* reported: "Such was Tarrant's deep and sometimes obscure knowledge of Balkan war history going back centuries and his references and language used in the Serbian part of Herzegovina and Montenegro, even Serbians initially believed him to be one of their own, rather than a gym junkie from northern NSW." The Balkans has never recovered from the fratricidal wars and NATO-led foreign aggression of the 1990s, and remains a hotbed of interethnic and geopolitical strife, and international crime; as such, it is paid very close attention by many different countries' intelligence agencies. It is hardly conceivable that an outsider who made such an impression as Tarrant obviously did would not have come to the Five Eyes countries' attention, either directly or via friendly parties.

Recent red flags

In late 2017 Tarrant moved to Dunedin, 360 km south of Christchurch. It is not yet known whether his odd *curriculum vitae* prompted either Immigration or Police (during the requisite background checks before they granted him a firearms licence) to flag him to SIS; or, if they did, what reply the agency gave. What is known is that long before his attack, at least two patrons of the shooting range where Tarrant honed his skills were alarmed enough about him and/or the club in general to complain to police. News.com.au



CCTV footage of Brenton Tarrant entering Turkey in 2016.

reported 18 March that one local hunter who in November 2017 had been disturbed by Tarrant's behaviour at the range, wrote on Facebook after news broke of the shootings that he had "warned the police about the rifle club where he [Tarrant] trained". And former NZ Defence Forces machine-gunner Pete Breidahl, now a shooting instructor, told stuff.co.nz that he too had been "deeply troubled" by the club and its culture when in November 2017 he "overheard members talking about mass shootings ... and Martin Bryant", who killed 35 people in Port Arthur, Tasmania in 1996. He "was concerned the ethos at the club was the 'perfect breeding ground' for a mass shooter and lodged a formal complaint with the police", the article continued. Breidahl said: "The conversations I had and the people I met literally terrified me to my core." In remarks to the website Newshub, he added that "[there were] very strong attitudes towards immigration, Muslims being a very, very bad thing for New Zealand." Incredibly, the *Australian* reported 19 March that Tarrant was even then practicing at the range with the same semi-automatic rifle, already "daubed with slogans including 'Refugees—welcome to Hell'", that he would later use in his atrocity. Yet the police waved the complaints away.

Tarrant's online activity leading up to the attack was so blatant that it should have set off sirens in GCSB. Tarrant had for some time been active on a notorious ethno-nationalist/white supremacist discussion group (or "board") on internet forum 8chan, dedicated to encouraging acts of terrorism against non-whites anywhere in "European lands" (which by their definition somehow include Australia and NZ). *Two days before the attack*, Tarrant posted photographs there and on Twitter of his guns, magazines and other kit covered in anti-Muslim slogans and threats; the names of other white supremacist killers, including Anders Breivik, the Norwegian neo-Nazi who killed 77 in Oslo and Utoya Island in 2011; and references to the Crusades.

Then, as ABC current affairs program Four Corners reported 25 March, on the day of the attack Tarrant posted a link on Facebook to his manifesto—which listed the mosques he intended to target—at noon, one hour and forty minutes before he started shooting. At 1:28 PM, 12 minutes before the first shots, Tarrant announced on 8chan that he was about to commence his attack, and gave a link to a livestreamed video on Facebook. Had one or more Five Eyes agencies been monitoring the 8chan board—which, given its notoriety, they almost certainly were—they could have tracked Tarrant by the clearly audible directions from his GPS navigator, and sent police to intercept him.

Known wolves

As the



The 8chan bulletin board comment Tarrant posted announcing his attack.

Citizens Electoral Council has documented, the common thread running through every domestic terror attack in both [Australia](#) and the [UK](#) in recent decades is that the perpetrators have all been well known to the security and intelligence services, and in many cases their actual agents. Whilst most of these have been Islamist extremists, Britain's MI5 in particular is known for its control and deployment of right-wing groups, such as the "loyalist" terrorists it used to stoke the 30-year (1968-98) undeclared Irish civil war known as "the Troubles". The Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) also has long-established ties with both Islamist and far-right organisations, which can be played off against each other whenever the establishment wants to polarise the community for political purposes.

NZ authorities reportedly resumed intensive monitoring of "far-right threats" only late last year, after focusing mainly on Islamists since the 11 September 2001 attacks in the USA and the advent of the "global war on terror". This is not so in Australia, the 20 March *Australian* reported: "The Prime Minister [Scott Morrison] said this morning that Australia's security services have been gathering 'quite a bit of' intelligence on white supremacists for a long period of time. ... 'When it comes to our knowledge of white supremacists or separatists or other extreme groups like this, we have got quite a bit of intelligence in these areas and it does go back quite a way on these groups.'" So why wasn't Tarrant on the list?