

# The New Western Wall: the use of the Crusades in the rationale of far-right organisations and what this reveals about the readings of its history

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## Weaponised history?

For my research project, I wished to investigate how Crusade history was weaponised to create identities and rationales of far-right groups and how this reflected its historical readings from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. To gain a broader understanding, I employed 'far-right' as an umbrella term for both Islamist extremist groups as well as extreme-right pan-European/ white supremacist groups since they share many characteristics such as militant religiosity and the advocacy of enforced ethnonationalism.

## Key Findings

- The Templar Cross (aka St. George's Cross) and the Knights Templar order has been adopted by numerous Euro-American white supremacist organisations to symbolise the desire for pan-European ethnonationalism and as an expression of their organisational identity.
- Literary orientalism seen in the works of 19<sup>th</sup> century authors depicting the dehumanisation of Muslim peoples is indirectly responsible for the creation of current anti-Muslim rhetoric demonstrated in said organisations.
- The premise of martyrdom and the duties of *jihād* stated in the *Book of the Jihād* (1105) by al-Sulami were exaggerated by modern Salafi-jihadist groups in the late 1970s to instigate and convince members to commit terrorist acts.
- Saladin (c.1137-93) has been interpreted by said groups as an inspiration and justification for their extremist iteration of *jihād*.

## Conclusions

Through my research, I was able to draw **two main conclusions**:

- There are distinct parallels between the uses of crusade history for the rationales of Islamist and Christian extremist groups respectively involving the deliberate manipulation of historical narratives seen in propaganda, manifestos, and group symbolism.
- Crusade history is particularly susceptible far-right extremist interpretations due to the perception of the Crusades as a historical conflict between the 'Christian West' versus the 'Islamic East', a prominent political contention since the events of 9/11.

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Flag with the Templar cross with the text "Deus Vult" beneath it photographed by the American Historical Association, 2021

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Statue of Saladin sculpted in 1993 by Abdallah al-Sayed in Damascus, Syria photographed by Graham van der Wielen via Flickr, 2008

