

**Ramon Spaaij. Understanding Lone Wolf Terrorism: Global Patterns, Motivations and Prevention.****London/New York: Springer, 2012. Springer, 2012. ISBN 978-94-007-2980-3.****119 pp. US \$49.95/ £ 44.99.****Reviewed by Mark S. Hamm**

To say that lone wolf terrorism is a neglected field of research is an understatement. Lone wolf terrorism has so far engendered few empirical studies or government reports and little textbook information. Nor is there a professional consensus on the definition of the crime. Such a void is troublesome, given that lone wolves have proven to be especially challenging for police and intelligence communities because they are extremely difficult to detect and to defend against.

Ramon Spaaij's *Understanding Lone Wolf Terrorism* is therefore an important contribution to the literature. Spaaij begins this thoughtful and meticulous analysis by offering a concise four-part definition of lone wolf terrorism that clearly distinguishes the phenomenon from terrorist activities carried out by underground organisations or states. Based on this definition, Spaaij examines the leading international databases and identifies 88 cases of lone wolf terrorism in North America, Europe and Australia between 1940 and 2010. The cases resulted in 198 attacks claiming 123 lives and injuring hundreds more. Spaaij then employs a case study analysis and concludes that while there is no standard profile of the lone wolf, radicalisation tends to result from a combination of individual processes, interpersonal relations and socio-political and cultural circumstances—a view that is consistent with a wider body of terrorism research showing that there is no specific “conveyor belt” to radicalisation. In this respect, Spaaij makes five ground-breaking observations.

*First*, Spaaij found that lone wolves tend to create their own ideologies that combine personal frustrations with broader political, social or religious grievances. Though important, this finding also highlights the difficulties of assigning clear-cut motives for the terrorist attacks. *Second*, and contrary to research indicating that terrorists do not suffer from any identifiable psychopathology, Spaaij shows that lone wolves are likely to suffer from some form of psychological disturbance. *Third*, lone wolves are inclined to suffer from social ineptitude: to varying degrees, they are loners with few friends and prefer to act alone. *Fourth*, even though lone wolves are by definition unaffiliated with a terrorist organisation, they may identify or sympathize with extremist groups and may have been members of such groups in the past. These organisations provide “ideologies of validation” for lone wolves and function as communities of belief by transferring personal frustrations onto the transgressive “other.”

*Fifth*, and most important in terms of prevention, lone wolf terrorism does not take place in a social vacuum. Instead, radicalisation can manifest itself in an activist stance involving the expression of one's political beliefs and a hyperactive search for both physical *and* verbal confrontation with adversaries. In other words, lone wolves tend to *broadcast their intent* to commit violence. A classic example is the “Unabomber Manifesto”—written by Theodore Kaczynski at his log cabin in the Montana wilderness and sent to the *New York Times* with a

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warning that his terror would continue until the Manifesto was published, leading to Kaczynski's arrest and the end of his 20-years long bombing campaign.

The tendency to distribute ideas and manifestos to the outside world extends to each case of lone wolf terrorism examined by Spaaij. And it applies to cases occurring since his research. For example, before he shot US Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords and 19 of her supporters in 2011, Jared Laughner displayed his contempt for government in numerous Facebook postings. Laughner also posted two YouTube videos; in one he is seen burning an America flag, and in the other he parrots popular themes of the radical right and provides his own definition of terrorism (his videos now have over 2 million hits). Laughner derided Giffords as a "fake" to classmates and even exchanged letters with the Congresswoman.

It is commonly assumed that lone wolves have a critical advantage in avoiding detection before and after their attacks because most of them do not communicate with others regarding their intentions. As US Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano once noted, lone wolf terrorist attacks are "the most challenging" from a law enforcement perspective, "because by definition they're not conspiring. They're not using the phones, the computer networks...they're not talking with others" (p. 3). It appears that they are doing precisely that.

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