

**Robin Maria Valeri and Kevin Borgeson (Eds.), *Terrorism in America*** (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), 244 pp., US \$ 164.00 [Hardcover], US \$ 43.96 [Paperback], ISBN: 978-1-1382-0209-2.

**Reviewed by Joshua Sinai**

Several mass casualty attacks have occurred in the United States in recent years, perpetrated by ideologically motivated extremist domestic terrorists - incidents like the shooting rampages by ISIS adherent Omar Mateen at the Pulse Nightclub in Orlando, Florida, on June 12, 2016 (49 killed, 53 wounded), or the massacre by the virulent white nationalist and anti-Semitic Robert Bowers of congregants at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on Oct. 27, 2018 (11 killed and 6 wounded). In another type of domestic terrorist attack, Cesar Sayoc was arrested in Plantation, Florida, on Oct. 26, 2018, for allegedly having mailed more than a dozen homemade improvised explosive parcel bombs to his liberal adversaries, including the CNN television network (no casualties).

What are the factors that motivate such diverse ideologically extremist US-based terrorists to carry out their violent attacks? Are they part of organized terrorist groups or lone actors that identify with, but are not members of, such groups? What future trends can we expect when it comes to domestic terrorist threats in terms of their perpetrators and the type of warfare they seek to wage and what are effective response measures to defeat them?

These are some of the questions addressed in "*Terrorism in America*." Although the volume under review is an academic book with plenty of theories by its eight contributors, its coverage of this subject from a criminological perspective is so insightful and detailed that it will also appeal to a broader audience that seeks to understand the magnitude of domestic terrorist threats facing America.

What is domestic terrorism? In the introductory chapter, the editors cite the FBI's definition as "Americans attacking Americans based on U.S.-based extremist ideologies" (p. 38) and "not directed by a foreign agent" (p. 38). This definition can be challenged as overly restrictive because many domestic lone actor terrorists are, in fact, influenced by extremist *foreign* ideologies, such as jihadism, and follow foreign-based groups' calls to act as more or less "independent franchisees" in order to carry out terrorist attacks.

The domestic terrorist groups discussed in this volume are primarily far-right-wing, far-left-wing and Islamist. The far-right-wing groups include white nationalists, neo-Nazis, Christian Identity groups, the Sovereign Citizens Movement and others. What is especially interesting about the psychological characteristics of the perpetrators, is, according to Kevin Borgeson's chapter on "Right-Wing Domestic Terrorism," that many of the perpetrators are lone actors who are frustrated with their personal and professional lives, are not married, and lack social valves to let off steam and constrain them from turning to extremist groups for guidance in an effort to understand why the world and their lives are "a mess." Joining such extremist groups, "increases their self-worth, allowing them to finally feel accepted and successful at something" (p. 31).

Paradoxically, however, many of the perpetrators of such attacks end up even failing in getting along with other extremists, due to their "social ineptitude" and other psychological factors, and become lone actor attackers on their own initiative. This was the case with Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols, the perpetrators of the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, on April 19, 1995 (168 persons killed, more than 680 others wounded), who, according to Joel A. Capellan's chapter on "Killing Alone: Can the Work Performance Literature Help Us Solve the Enigma of Lone Wolf Terrorism?," "were ostracized by the Michigan Militia because they advocated for violence" (p. 179).

The same psychological characteristics by susceptible individuals of the need to belong to such social groups also characterize many of those who become far-left-wing domestic terrorists; they join anarchist groups or become Animal/Earth Liberationists, Black Liberationists members or find similar groups.

In terms of their target selection, Michael Loadenthal, the author of the chapter on "Leftist Political Violence," asserts that, unlike far-right-wing terrorists who "frequently deployed lethal violence more indiscriminately and with less regard for civilian casualties," leftist violence "tends to be both symbolic and targeting inanimate

property, not humans” (p. 41) – a view with which this reviewer happens to disagree. Contrary to Loadenthal’s thesis, there are numerous examples of leftist violence causing fatalities, such as Ted Kaczynski (known as the “Unabomber”) whose mail parcel bombing campaign between 1978 and 1995 deliberately killed or wounded more than two dozen people. The same is true for the contemporary Black Lives movement, since some of the lone actors that associate themselves with it deliberately target law enforcement officers for assassination.

Islamist domestic terrorists, Christopher J. Wright explains in his chapter on “Islamist Terror in America,” are motivated by several factors, such as their belief that sharia (Islamic law) ought to be the law of the land for everybody and that the Muslim *ummah* (global Islamic nation) is being threatened by American military interventions in Muslim-majority countries for which, in their view, the United States deserves to be punished. This chapter also provides excellent case studies on domestic Islamist terrorists, including on the phenomenon of American foreign fighters who have joined local counterparts in conflict zones such as Syria.

Interestingly, like the far-left-wing terrorists who had targeted U.S. military facilities in the 1960s, Islamist terrorists (many of whom are characterized by personal psychological “issues” that turn them into lone actors) also target the U.S. military, such as in Maj. Nidal Hassan’s shooting rampage at Ft. Hood, Texas, on Nov. 5, 2009, killing 13 military personnel and wounding 32 others.

As to future trends in domestic terrorism, in the concluding chapter Robin Maria Valeri correctly observes that the availability of cyberspace’s telecommunications networks and computer systems make it possible for terrorists to “easily and inexpensively promote, recruit, and take credit for terrorist activities at a global level,” as well as to “commit acts of terrorism remotely” (p. 231).

To counter domestic terrorism, Ms. Valeri recommends a community-level based approach that could provide would-be terrorists with a sense of ‘belonging, meaning, and purpose in their lives - “because the best way to stop terrorism is by preventing its causes” (p. 235).

*N.B. This is a revised version of a review that initially appeared in The Washington Times. It is reprinted here by permission.*

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