

**Florian Hartleb. *Lone Wolf. The New Terrorism of Right-Wing Single Actors.*** Cham: Springer, 2020. 186 pp. ISBN 978-3-030-36153-2. Softcover: EUR 25.99; e-Book: EUR 21.39; US \$ 29.99.

Reviewed by José Pedro Zúquete

If you ask security policy makers or analysts what the dominant trend in terrorism is today, the chances are high that they will tell you that it is the threat of lone wolf terrorism, especially that originating from Islamic and far right environments. The last few years have witnessed a spike in the number of studies of this phenomenon. *Lone Wolves*, by the German political scientist Florian Hartleb, specifically probes the threat from solo right-wing actors and provides a far-ranging perspective on such perpetrators and their backgrounds, motivations, trajectories of violent radicalization, and murderous deeds.

Hartleb makes a good case throughout this book of the benefits of taking an in-depth look at the *particular* – at each episode of lone actor terrorism – in order to establish tendencies and commonalities and to capture the *universal*, or a broader view of the phenomenon. Three arguments specifically stand out. The author criticizes – rightly in my view – the way that authorities are often too quick to attribute attacks to mental imbalance or personal issues (the ‘running amok’ view) even when the choice of victims appears targeted, the perpetrator expressed clear grievances of a political or religious nature, or both. Such “depoliticisation” and “pathologisation” (p. 174-175) impede a full understanding of the act. The reasons for such a predisposition are, however, insufficiently explained here.

Hartleb, through various case studies, makes clear that lone wolves adhere to an ideology of validation that legitimizes the act. At the same time, he gives credence to the view that mental disorder is indeed a risk factor for lone-wolf terrorists even if it is not *the cause* of lone wolf terrorism. Finally, lone wolves are not really “lone,” in the sense that they are usually part of community subcultures and networks that are often virtual. Hence, “[t]his finding becomes even more significant, as it contradicts the assumption that lone wolf terrorists do not communicate with other people” (p. 166). The author makes a powerful case that David Sonboly, the German-Iranian teen who went on a killing spree in Munich in 2016, was *indeed* a lone wolf terrorist while the German authorities played down (even negated) the political motivations for his attack. The 18-year-old fit all criteria, including hatred for ethnic minorities, especially Turks, although he himself was of minority origin; the immersion in an online subculture where extremist and violent views were the norm (in the gaming platform ‘Steam’); and a mental disorder. As a counter-strategy and prevention measure, the author forcefully makes the case that the online communities of the video game industry constitute a sort of blind spot in the monitoring of extremism on the Internet.

*Lone Wolves: The New Terrorism of Right-Wing Single Actors* would have benefited from better editing; the language is often convoluted, and some sentences are confusing to read. There are minor factual mistakes too: Hartleb confuses Richard Spencer, a major Alt Right leader, with Robert Spencer, the Counter Jihadi ideologue (p. 145), while shortly before that, he states that the “Bible” of the Identitarian movement is a book by Renaud Camus on the “Great Replacement” (p. 141). However, if the movement has a “Bible,” it is Guillaume Faye’s *Why We Fight*). Finally, I think the volume lacks sufficient dialogue with social psychology literature, particularly in terms of psychological factors that may serve as a catalyst for lone wolves. For example, the hypothesis that some individuals may be pushed to action owing not to lack of empathy but rather to an excess of empathy to the grievances of his group (or the group he sees himself part of). Yet all in all, these are minor shortcomings. This is a book well worth reading as it opens new research directions not only regarding the question of “what makes a lone wolf terrorist” but also how the milieus that propagate them may be countered. If, as many believe, we are going through the initial stages of a renaissance of lone wolf terrorism, these issues assume utmost importance, and Hartleb is to be commended for addressing them.

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*About the Reviewer: José Pedro Zúquete, Ph.D. is a political sociologist. His research focuses on comparative radical politics, social movements, and the impact of globalization. He is currently a Research Fellow at the Institute of Social Sciences- University of Lisbon, Portugal.*