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Terrorism: Domestic

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Terrorism is a crime that everyone can recognize when it happens, yet few can agree on exactly how it is defined. While there is not a single and universally accepted definition of *terrorism*, the U.S. Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), in Section 0.85, defines it as “the unlawful use of force and violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives.” Terrorism is “domestic terrorism” when the terrorist activity occurs within one country, by a group or individual operating within that country without foreign direction, to create fear and produce change within that same country. The effect of terrorist activity is most devastating when the violent acts are forced upon the civilian, noncombatant population. Domestic terrorists, often called home-grown terrorists, have historically been responsible for most of the terrorist activity within the United States.

Other Definitions of Terrorism

After the horrific events of September 11, 2001, the U.S. Congress responded with the passage of the U.S.A. Patriot Act (Public Law 107-52) to strengthen the authority of law-enforcement officers to pursue terrorists and prevent further terrorism in the United States. Section 802 of the act expanded the definition of terrorism in the U.S. Code. Title 18, Section 2331(5) of the U.S. Code defines domestic terrorism as any activity that involves

(A) ... acts dangerous to human life that are a violation of the criminal laws of the United States or of any State [and] appear to be intended—
(i) to intimidate or coerce a civilian population; (ii) to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or (iii) to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping;
... and (C) occur primarily within the territorial jurisdiction of the United States.

The well-known scholar and terrorism expert Walter Laqueur (1987) defines terrorism as the “illegitimate use of force to achieve a political objective when innocent people are targeted.”

The Lost Word

The word that is absent from most definitions of terrorism is *fear*, yet it is the key to understanding how terrorists operate. The term *terrorism* has its origin in the domestic terrorism that existed throughout France during its revolution in the 18th century. In the period following the French Revolution, Maximilien Robespierre created the Reign of Terror as he eliminated his enemies, killing more than 30,000 people from 1793 through 1794. Those who supported the monarchy or were suspected of opposing the new French liberty were executed. Robespierre created an environment of fear throughout the country; people would not voice opposition for fear that they would be next in line for the guillotine.

While fear is a key element in many other crimes, such as blackmail, threats, and extortion, it is the key tool of the terrorist. It is fear that may stop a logger from cutting down a tree that may contain [p. 403 ↓] a steel spike; it is fear that will push doctors and patients away from abortion clinics where patrons and practitioners have been killed; and it is fear that will cause the young starlet to think twice about wearing an expensive white fur coat to a gala event, only to have blood thrown at her by those with radical animal rights agendas.

Terrorism as Crime

First and foremost, terrorism is a crime. The crime of domestic terrorism is essentially any underlying criminal offense that has an increased penalty because the motivation or reason behind the commission of the crime meets the statutory definition of terrorism, under a federal or state statute. Under the law, use of the word *terrorism* carries a penalty enhancement to the appropriate crime. These terrorist-related offenses include, but are not limited to, homicide, kidnapping, maiming, assault, destruction of property, making threats, and conspiracy.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) is the lead federal law-enforcement agency responsible for investigating criminal acts of domestic terrorism, and the charges are prosecuted by the U.S. attorney for the district where the crime occurred. Each

investigation is conducted according to the *Attorney General's Guidelines on General Crimes, Racketeering Enterprise and Terrorism Enterprise Investigations*. On April 14, 2011, Mark Giuliano, assistant director in the FBI's Counterterrorism Division, stated that the "homegrown violent extremist threat is one of the serious terrorism threats we face inside the homeland outside of al Qaeda and its affiliates. Homegrown violent extremism (HVE) is very difficult to define. It is a rapidly evolving threat with characteristics that are constantly changing due to external experiences and motivational factors." The FBI is quick to acknowledge that, unlike those who may be involved in transnational terrorism, domestic terrorists are already in the United States, and they may well be next-door neighbors.

Terrorist Groups and Incidents

Domestic terrorist groups exist for many reasons and in many forms, with widely diverging objectives and motives. While some seek only to reform what they see as a system that ignores certain human, animal, or ecological rights, other groups attempt to destroy a system that they believe chokes their liberty and that of others. Various militia groups, also known as separatist groups or supremacy groups, seek to terrorize government officials and any other citizens who support the federal and state governments and the laws they create. Groups that have been involved in domestic terrorist activity include the Aryan Nation, Black Panthers, Weather Underground, Symbionese Liberation Army, Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional (FALN), Army of God, Ku Klux Klan, Posse Comitatus, Christian Identity, and various ecoterror and animal rights groups. There have also been numerous "lone-wolf" terrorists who have acted on their own to redirect the politics or religion of the nation.

The FBI and other law-enforcement organizations have been largely successful in minimizing the impact of domestic terrorists. In March 2011, five members of a right-wing militia group were arrested in Fairbanks, Alaska, on charges of conspiracy to commit murder, kidnapping, and arson, including numerous firearms charges. These individuals conspired to kidnap and kill police officers and judges. The group is known as the Alaska Peacemakers Militia (APM), and its members are also associated with similar groups and entities, such as the Liberty Bell Network, Alaska Citizens Militia, We the People (WTP), the Sovereign Citizen Movement, and the Second Amendment

Task Force. APM's leader is known for saying that he is “not opposed to bloody force” in support of “sovereign citizen” rights. The Southern Poverty Law Center has reported that WTP sees the federal government as a threat to life, liberty, and property.

The Sovereign Citizen Movement is a right-wing antigovernment, white supremacist group that rejects federal and state authority. Group members consider themselves “sovereign citizens” and exhibit antigovernment philosophies similar to those espoused by Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols, the two individuals responsible for the terrorist bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. The FBI has indicated that members of the group commit murder and physical assault and threaten judges, law-enforcement officers, and government personnel. In May 2010, two Sovereign Citizens (a father and son) shot and killed two police officers during a traffic stop; the driver of the stopped vehicle had simply been asked to produce a valid state driver's license. In March 2009, four members of the Sovereign Citizen Movement were arrested for money laundering, tax evasion, and possession of unregistered machine guns. The [p. 404 ↓] group is the subject of an investigation conducted by a joint terrorism task force (JTTF). The Anti-Defamation League has stated that the “Sovereign Citizens wage war against the government and other forms of authority using ‘paper terrorism’ harassment and intimidation tactics, and occasionally resorting to violence.”

In January 2011, a pipe bomb was discovered in a backpack left on the route of a Martin Luther King Day parade in Spokane, Washington. Although the device did not explode, it was built for remote detonation, meaning that it was designed to be detonated from a distance at an optimal time. Had the bomb exploded, the loss of life and personal injuries would have been devastating. Nevertheless, the discovery alone of such a threat is sufficient to create fear and to discourage people from celebrating a national holiday. Although in the Spokane incident the FBI's JTTF arrested an individual, there will be others who take a similar approach to political change.

“To instill fear” is the reason that Antonio Martinez said that he wanted to kill everyone at a military recruitment station in Maryland, detonate a car bomb, and then burn the building. In December 2010, Martinez, a recent convert to Islam using the name Muhammad Hussain, was arrested by the FBI and charged with attempted murder and the use of a weapon of mass destruction. Martinez also discussed the possibility of blowing up Andrews Air Force Base. A similar event was attempted in Portland, Oregon,

the previous month; the FBI was also able to intercept that terrorist before anything could happen. The FBI and Oregon law-enforcement officers arrested Mohamed Osman Mohamud, a naturalized U.S. citizen, who planned to detonate a car bomb during the lighting of a Christmas tree, which would have resulted in the deaths of children and their families.

In March 2010, nine members of the Michigan-based Hutaree Militia, another domestic terrorist group, were indicted by a federal grand jury for their involvement in a plot to kill law-enforcement officers and judges. The Title 18 criminal charges in the indictment included violations identified in sections 842(p)(2), 924c(1), 2332a(a)(2), and 2384. As the indictment indicated, the militia group had planned various terrorist activities. Describing themselves as a “Christian warrior” group, they viewed all law enforcement as the enemy. The indictment stated that members planned a violent act to get the attention of the police, possibly by killing an officer at a traffic stop, then attacking the funeral procession with explosives.

Ecoterrorists and animal rights extremists are described by the FBI as among the most serious domestic terrorism threats. These groups have been involved with more than 2,000 crimes and losses of more than \$110 million since 1979. The Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act of 2006 (Public Law 109-374, Title 18, Section 43 of the U.S. Code) provided law-enforcement agents with additional authority to fight domestic terrorism. A key phrase in the act addresses those whose actions place a person in “fear” of death or serious bodily injury—fear being a key element of terrorism.

The Animal Liberation Front (ALF), Earth Liberation Front (ELF), and Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty (SHAC) are three examples of radical animal rights and environmental domestic terrorist groups that have been responsible for hundreds of terrorist acts and \$100 million of damage. Their methods involve arson, bombing, vandalism, and other serious crimes. These groups have targeted medical research laboratories, auto dealerships, universities, and housing developments, to mention just a few targets. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) is an ALF supporter but is less violent and destructive in its methods. In 2004, ALF and ELF were described by the FBI as two of the most active extremist elements in the United States. In 2006, as part of Operation Backfire, the FBI charged 11 defendants in a 65-count indictment with acts of domestic terrorism, relating to conspiracy, arson, use of destructive devices, and

destruction of an energy facility over a five-year period. The ecoterrorist acts included 17 attacks and \$12 million in damage due to arson in Vail, Colorado.

The perfect example of the lone-wolf domestic terrorist is Ted Kaczynski, the so-called Unabomber. Kaczynski, an anarchist, operated for almost two decades setting bombs in a variety of places in his effort to reform what he saw as a technology-burdened industrial society. He would send letters to the press and private companies telling them about the bombs he was making in an effort to create a high level of fear; he saw himself as a revolutionary destined to reform society through destruction. In a lengthy manifesto, Kaczynski stated that “the industrial revolution and its consequences have been a disaster for the human race.”

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Another lone-wolf domestic terrorist is Eric Rudolph, another bomber. However, Rudolph's terrorist motivations were different from those of Kaczynski. Known as the Olympic Park bomber for the bomb he placed at the site of the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta, Georgia, Rudolph hoped that the bomb would create such a high level of fear that the Olympics would be canceled, causing financial devastation to the local economy and the corporations who sponsored it. He was not successful. Other bombings by Rudolph involved a gay bar and abortion clinics. His actions were intended to strike a high level of fear in those who sought to socialize in gay bars or those who sought abortion clinic services. They would not know when or where the next bomb would explode and hence would, he expected, avoid those places. The bombs he planted resulted in both injury and death. His bombings reflected his rejection of the government, the gay lifestyle, and abortion, and he sought to impose his beliefs on others through the use of terrorism.

Domestic Terrorism Outside the United States

Unfortunately, domestic terrorism is not limited to any one country. The United Kingdom has extensive experience with domestic terrorism, dating back to the 1600s and the

slaughter of thousands of Irish Catholics by Oliver Cromwell, who believed he was acting in the name of God. In the 20th century, the major domestic terrorism in the United Kingdom involved attacks against both civilian and military personnel (on and off duty) by Irish independence groups. The Irish Republican Army (IRA), Sinn Féin, and other groups have fought against the Crown and British citizens for Irish freedom. The longstanding conflict was also seen as a battle between the Catholics of Ireland and the Protestants of England and Northern Ireland. After years of battle, a peace agreement was reached. Today, domestic terrorism in the United Kingdom involves radical Muslim groups, some of whom are immigrants and others who were born in the United Kingdom, homegrown terrorists. The indiscriminate bombings and attempted bombings of planes, buses, shopping centers, subways, and other public areas have returned. These violent domestic terrorist acts by many Muslim groups are examples of both domestic and nondomestic terrorism.

In Russia, government-sponsored terrorism reached a high point during the 1950s under Joseph Stalin's rule. There were also numerous terrorist events as the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics evolved into the Russian Federation following the Soviet Union's dissolution in 1991. However, domestic terrorism now has a new face with the continuing conflict with the Chechens, who are mostly Muslim. Although Chechnya declared its independence from Russia, it was denied by the government. Since that time, there have been numerous domestic terrorist events involving innocent civilians and armed conflict with state forces; terrorist activities included suicide bombings in a Moscow theater, a school (in Beslan), trains, and subways. The bombing of Moscow's Domodedovo Airport in January 2011 was believed to be perpetrated by the same person responsible for several bombings, a native Russian who converted to Islam; this person was suspected of a failed attempt to detonate a bomb during Russian New Year's celebrations in Red Square (after the phone company sent an automated text message—ironically wishing recipients a happy new year—that detonated the device prematurely via her cell phone). Islamic terrorist successes have increased through the use of native Russian converts, with jihadist terrorism an ongoing domestic issue for the Russian Federation.

Domestic terrorism in China is also not new. The most notable instances involved executions and other killings during the Chinese Communist and Cultural Revolution. During his reign of terror, Mao Zedong was reportedly responsible for the deaths of

between 700,000 and 2 million Chinese, his own countrymen and countrywomen. While he attempted to justify his actions as a necessity to institute reforms in China, the methods of the Maoist regime—of seizing and controlling power and instituting policies that strictly controlled expression and behavior among the Chinese populace—are the same as those used two centuries earlier during the French Revolution. Despite economic reforms, the Chinese government today still rules with an iron hand that maintains a high level of fear in its citizens. There is a constant questioning of what price a “dissident” must pay for an independent voice. Terrorism within China now comes from groups such as the East Turkestan Islamic Party, the Turkestan Islamic Party, and similar groups that are responsible for a series of bombings in Shanghai, Wenzhou, Guangzhou, and Kunming.

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Conclusions

Domestic terrorism in democratic nations is not a product of the state but is directed at the state and its citizens in order to create fear and effect change. The biggest challenge to law enforcement is to identify homegrown terrorists, infiltrate their organizations, and stop them in their tracks. As indicated above, in the United States, JTTFs have been very successful; it is to be hoped that their success continues.

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See also

- [Terrorism: Nondomestic](#)

Further Readings

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