

American Terror

Jihadist extremists are not the only groups within the borders of the United States using, or threatening to use violence against civilians to accomplish their ideological goals. According to the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Response to Terrorism (START), the largest subset of domestic terror can be found within the far-right. This wing of terror is becoming increasingly active as the 21st century progresses - in the past six months, right-wing terror has been more active than it has in the past decade (Pasha – Robinson). Despite this, government leaders refuse to label right-wing extremists as terrorists. Under Professor Boaz Ganor's definition, terrorism must consist of violence against civilians with the goal of achieving political, ideological, or religious aims. Examining Ganor's three-part definition of terrorism, clarifies what constitutes terrorism in the United States; this definition considered white supremacist groups must be classified as terrorist actors (Ganor). It is time that the US realizes that groups such as the Ku Klux Klan and the Aryan Brotherhood are terrorist organizations so that the growing national security threat can be properly addressed. Furthermore, media reporting needs to begin to accurately reflect the threats that are being faced by the United States of America today.

To successfully discuss terrorism, it is necessary to first define terrorism. According to Professor Boaz Ganor, terrorism is defined as, "a violent struggle, intentionally using or threatening to use, violence against civilians, in order to attain political aims." (Ganor) Therefore, there are three essential parts required to classify an action as one of terror. First and foremost, the act must involve violence, either the direct use of violence or the threat of violence (Ganor). Secondly, the target of the attack must be civilians or be civilian in nature, for example a store or a city street. If the attack is not directed towards civilians it cannot be considered terrorism (Ganor). Finally, an attack must have political, religious, or ideologically motives in

order to constitute a terrorist attack. If an attack does not possess one of these motives, it would just be a felonious matter, not terrorism (Ganor). When combined together, these three elements result in a cohesive definition that allows for the easy examination of various attacks and groups to decide if they participate in terrorism.

The Ku Klux Klan has been acting in a terroristic manner since after the conclusion of the American Civil War in 1865 (Martin 199). Since its inception, the Ku Klux Klan has maintained its goal to suppress minority groups, particularly Blacks, in the United States through the use of psychological fear and violence. The peak of the Ku Klux Klan came during the Civil Rights Era of the 1950's and 1960's. Many factions of the Klan used extreme levels of violence, especially in states such as Mississippi and Alabama (200). Their main methods of attack have been assassinations by lynching, church burnings, and cross burnings (200). The connotation that became associated with this violence ultimately lead to all these actions being classified as hate crimes by the US Government to be investigated by Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) ("KKK Series"). The violence taken on by the Ku Klux Klan during the Civil Rights Era led to a heavy response from the FBI; the southern field offices of the FBI began to focus their attention on the apprehension of Klan members ("KKK Series"). The FBI's intense focus on the Klan in the 1970's and 1980's has led to the form of the Ku Klux Klan seen today: some members have become more moderate in their beliefs while others have become more extreme (Martin 201). The extreme members, commonly referred to as "skin-heads", need to be placed under consideration to be classified as terrorists. When these men and women use or threaten to use violence on civilians that they have deem to be of "lesser value" than themselves in order to achieve their political goals; that is when they are no longer extremists, they have become terrorists.

Similarly to the Ku Klux Klan, Neo-Nazis, such as the Aryan Brotherhood, began to instill psychological fear within the American Jewish population by using violence (Martin 201). Their operations began in the early 1980's but they were most violent during the mid-1990's in the Midwest and Northwest regions of the United States (201). Common actions taken by members of these groups have been bank robberies, counterfeiting, hate crimes, and murder (201). This sect of terrorists saw a deep decline in activity in 1985 after twenty members were successfully apprehended and incarcerated in December of that year (201). Nowadays, Neo-Nazis commonly operate alongside the Klan (Jones). This was most clearly seen on August 12, 2017 at the Unite the Right Rally in Charlottesville, Virginia (Sayers). White supremacists and Neo-Nazis alike came together in the street to preach their hateful ideologies; this resulted in the death of one woman, Heather Heyer, who was there protesting the far-right groups (Sayers).

This incident demonstrates that both sects of far-right terror are alive and well; not only are they surviving, they are thriving. As President Trump continues his bigoted rhetoric, these groups are emboldened and continue to increase their tendency to utilize violence (Jones). President Trump's refusal to condemn white supremacist actors encourages them to continue their hateful behavior and suggests to the rest of America that the US Government is not concerned with this growing threat (Sargent). This blatant disregard is dangerous for national security. In 2016 alone, white supremacist groups planned to attack, "courthouses, banks, festivals, funerals, schools, mosques, churches, synagogues, clinics, water-treatment plants, and power grids." (Jones) Furthermore, these groups intended to employ violence by using weapons such as knives, guns, grenades, and bombs (Jones). There is a need for an immediate realization of the classification of these groups. These groups have been operating within the border of the United States with limited law enforcement intervention for too long. The ability to operate

freely has allowed acts, like the death of Heather Heyer, to go mislabeled. Far-right extremists have been often only labeled as hate groups, but it is time that these groups also be labeled as terrorist organizations.

The right-wing has been increasingly active in the past decade (Miller). Regardless of this increased activism, far-right groups such as the Ku Klux Klan and the Aryan Brotherhood are often not classified as terrorist organizations (Bergen 86). This blatant disregard towards obvious terrorism emboldens an entire class of terrorists who already have a “higher propensity towards violence.” (Bergen 86) When far-right terrorist organizations like the Ku Klux Klan and the various sects of the Aryan Brotherhood are examined using Ganor’s definition of terrorism it becomes abundantly clear that they must be classified as terrorist actors. Firstly, these groups are less likely to carry out large-scale attacks than their jihadist counter-parts, but they are more likely to carry out small, concentrated attacks (Martin 198). Therefore, these groups do participate in the use of violence, and continuously threaten violence on racial, ethnic, and religious groups they deem to be “lesser” (198). Consequently, far-right groups desire to carry out violence on civilians and specifically civilians of minority groups such as African Americans or Jewish Americans (199, 201). Finally, the far-right operates in order to advance their hateful anti-Black and anti-Semitic ideologies into American Culture (202). After a close examination of far-right activities and beliefs, it becomes evident that they are not only just hate groups but also a domestic terrorist network.

Despite the clear evidence of their terrorist nature, both government figures and private citizens, resist to believe that groups such as the Ku Klux Klan and the Aryan Brotherhood should be classified as terrorist groups. Those who hold the opinion that the far-right does not constitute terror believe that the media and liberal members of the government are over-reacting

because of a few, violent individuals (Goldberg 94). Furthermore, people believe that right-wing terrorists are persecuted far more than their jihadist counter-parts (Goldberg 95). These beliefs are factually insecure. It is much more than a 'few', violent individuals; actually, the majority of the terrorist actors in the United States subscribe to the far-right ideology ("Profiles of Individual Radicalization"). According to START 39.8% of all radicalized individuals in the US believe in far-right ideologies as compare to the 24.3% who participate in jihad ("Profiles of Individual Radicalization"). Furthermore, in 2016, jihadist terrorists and far-right terrorists were arrested and indicted at extremely similar rates; about 76.6% of jihadists and about 75.3% of far-right terrorists were successfully apprehended ("Profiles of Individual Radicalization"). Data shows that these beliefs are not only harmful in the fight against terror, but also factually wrong in that far-right terror poses a serious threat to national security.

Increasing this issue, these individuals do not only believe that right-wing extremists do not constitute terrorist actors, but they also believe that law enforcement efforts should not be supplied to the investigation and apprehension of these groups (Neyfakh). They believe efforts would be better applied by concentrating on jihadist extremists rather than investigating terrorism on a whole, because the jihadists have been the most violent group in recent history. According to ex-FBI Special Agent Michael German, federal law enforcement agencies determine which terrorist actors to investigate based on that individuals' radicalization and propensity for violence. Therefore, according to German, white supremacists should not be the focus of terror investigations, jihadists should (Neyfakh). If an individual's ability to carry out a terror plot is the determining factor to whether or not they are of national security concern, then right-wing terror should be investigated by the US Government at an equal level as jihadist terror. Last year, 44.98% of successful terror plots carried out within the border of the United

States were orchestrated by far-right terror groups (“Profiles of Individual Radicalization”). Until adequate investigative efforts are placed towards learning about the workings of right-wing terror, it is unclear whether right-wing terror is more successful because they are more motivated than their jihadist counterparts or if they have just been widely ignored by federal law enforcement.

Since the turn of the century, terrorism in general has surprisingly decreased in lethality with the exception being the attacks of September 11th. As the deadliness of the terrorist attacks are in decline, the perpetrators of these attacks are shifting as well (Miller). From 2010 to 2017, the amount of terrorist attacks that were implemented by left-wing actors decrease from 64% to 12% and the attacks carried out by right-wing actors increased from 6% to 35% (Miller). These statistics demonstrate a clear trend within the United States: terrorism is coming from within its own borders. According to START’s Profiles of Individual Radicalization in the United States (PIRUS) data, of the 1,867 radicalized individuals of 2016, 1,764 of those individuals were US citizens (“Profiles of Individual Radicalization”). Furthermore, terrorism is increasingly originating from right-wing extremist groups. 746 individuals were members of far-right ideological groups, compared to 457 individuals who were members of jihadist extremist groups (“Profiles of Individual Radicalization”). Even though the three of the five most active terrorist affiliates within the United States follow jihadist believes, the far-right is the largest sub-sect of terrorist actors within the United States of America (“Profiles of Individual Radicalization”).

The United States Government has a severe problem; there is currently a serious national security threat growing within the United States, but it is being widely ignored. Citizens and government officials of the United States do not understand the wide breadth of terrorism, especially in regards to domestic terrorism. Therefore, far-right terrorism often goes unlabeled as

terrorism. There are various causes for this persistent problem. Firstly, it has to do with the fact that the deadliest terror attack in United States history, 9/11, was carried out by jihadist terrorists. This attack connected the term terrorism and jihad in the minds of the American public, and the two have remained connected ever since. Secondly, jihadist inspired terror attacks receive much higher levels of news-reporting than far-right attacks do. According to a study done by the Washington Post, attacks where the perpetrator subscribes to jihad receives about four times as much coverage as any other type of attack (Betus). Of the 89 terror attacks that took place from 2011-2015, only 17% of those were jihadist in nature, but those attacks received 76% percent of the media coverage (Betus). This bias news coverage further connects the terms terrorism and jihad, closing off peoples' minds to the idea that terrorism can be more than jihad. Finally, government officials have much stronger reactions towards attacks carried out by jihadists rather than those carried out by far-right terrorists. This lack of reaction emboldens right-wing terror actors, allowing them to continue to operate within the United States.

In order to begin to correctly label terrorism in the United States, the aforementioned problems must be addressed. Sadly, the attacks of September 11th already occurred, and it is impossible to undo what was done that day; therefore, it is nearly impossible to disconnect the term jihad and terrorism from the minds of Americans. What needs to be done is to continue to report on jihadist inspired attacks, but make individuals aware of other attacks. Jihadist terror is still a threat to national security and it must be treated as such, but right-wing terror is a threat to national security as well. It is necessary to give the same level of attention to all types of attacks regardless of the perpetrator. Unbias media reporting would allow the American population to properly understand the threats they are experiencing, while simultaneously decreasing jihad's power as well. Furthermore, US Government officials need to acknowledge the severity of the

right-wing terrorism and act accordingly, condemning them as much as they condemn jihadist actors. This condemnation would signal to right-wing terror groups that they will no longer be able to operate freely within the United States. Furthermore, it will similarly demonstrate to the American public that terrorism is much more than jihad.

No longer can it be denied that right-wing extremist groups in the United States are terrorist actors. When their actions are examined through the lens of Professor Boaz Ganor's three-part definition of terrorism, it become evident what their classification truly is; they are terrorists. This improper classification of an entire terrorist network emboldens a class of actors who look to carry out violent attacks on innocent people. As we progress into the 21st Century, these terrorists have only become increasingly active, with the majority of radicalization, terrorist actors, and plots originating from the far-right ("Profiles in Individual Radicalization"). It does not appear that the United States Government is working towards limiting this growing threat; recently the Trump Administration has cut about ten million dollars in funding that was being used to fight right-wing radicalization efforts (Pasha-Robinson). This behavior by the US Government must change. It is time that the government treat this issue with the significance that is necessary, in order to do that far-right extremist groups, like the Ku Klux Klan and the Aryan Brotherhood, must be classified as terrorist organizations.

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