

Removing a Log from the Nation's Eye:  
A National Self-Analysis of the Domestic Terrorism Question

Promise of the Declaration:  
Building on a Legacy of "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness"

Katherine R. Doan  
Liberty University

Katherine Doan is currently pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in American Sign Language and Interpreting in the College of Arts and Sciences as well as a Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice in the Helms School of Government at Liberty University. Upon graduation of both programs in Spring 2024, her plans are to become an American Sign Language interpreter for the 4<sup>th</sup> Circuit Appellate Court.

## **Abstract**

Terroristic values are easy to be ascribed to foreign enemies, but it is far more difficult to admit that domestic citizens could be extremist to the point of being labeled a terrorist. Terrorists are not born; they are made. The following research focuses on the commonalities of upbringing in known domestic terrorists within the United States of America that may reveal noticeable similarities in education, radicalization, and identity. The criminal justice system has yet to discover a perfect method of administering retribution to terrorists. While they have broken the law, their intentions and results are not the same as an ordinary criminal. While criminals tend to focus on personal gain, financial rewards, and secrecy, terrorists are far more interested in making a political statement in the open to begin immediate and drastic change even if they are killed for it. The media has the constitutional right to information, but if that information being distributed to the public could cause undue panic, perhaps it should not be released in such a biased manner. The name 'terrorist' is one that is placed on a person, government state, or idea. It is not specific to a nationality or ethnic group, which means that the United States is not in any way immune to this label. Domestic terrorism must be understood so that it can be prevented.

Keywords: Terrorism, America, domestic, law, government, criminal, justice

## **Removing a Log from the Nation's Eye: A National Self-Analysis of the Domestic Terrorism Question**

Danger that is within a nation's borders can be far more difficult to identify and remove in the same way that identifying character flaws is much easier to do to another person. These threats are not just dangerous, they can be even more threatening, because the perpetrators are keenly aware of the internal workings of their own country. Matthew 7:3 says, "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?" In the same way that God calls Christians to recognize internal flaws before judging others, a nation must first address the internal dilemmas that could destabilize economic, political, and social internal workings of the country. International terrorism is naturally the most publicized event in media. It is simple to unite a nationalistic country against a foreign threat, but it is far more difficult to rally a people against what appears to be a part of themselves.

### **Definition of Terrorism**

Every nation defines terrorism differently, and even separate groups within the same nation may have conflicting definitions for how this idea should be summarized. While a consensus has not been reached for what definitionally constitutes a terrorist, there are many commonalities among various definitions that can be combined to create a broad classification of this group. For the purposes of this research, a terrorist will be defined as "A person who uses unlawful, violent tactics to intimidate others in the pursuit of political change." While this is not an expansive, all-inclusive definition, it is truly the heart of what terrorism is and causes: societal unrest to facilitate immediate change in some way.

### **Causes of Terrorist Ideologies**

It is easy to assume that terrorists are born violent, evil people who are predisposed to some type of dangerous desires from a very young age. While this line of thinking may be convenient, it is unfortunately not that simple. Aleksandr Solzhenicyn in *The Gulag Archipelago* described the impossibility of separating good from evil.

"If only it were all so simple! If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?"<sup>1</sup>

Simply put, some capacity for evil can be found in every person. It merely takes the right compilation of circumstances to bring these desires to fruition. Any combination of tragedy, poverty, distrust in governing officials, or noble aspirations for political change can become extremist rather quickly. The building blocks of extremism are rooted in the very individuality that mankind holds so dear.

---

<sup>1</sup> Александр Исаевич Солженицын, *The Gulag Archipelago, 1918-1956: An Experiment in Literary Investigation* (Harper & Row, 1974).

## Beginning Stages of Making a Terrorist

### Isolation

Hudson explained the significance of isolation and the role it plays in creating terrorists.<sup>2</sup> This isolation can be externally imposed in manners such as peer rejection and a perceived lack of outside support, but it can also be internally fabricated in situations that stem from mental illness. Many individuals isolate themselves for creative and spiritual reasons such as artists, writers, and monks, but when isolation is not a choice, it can drastically alter their perspective on life. Rejection and even fear of rejection can decrease the physical or emotional connections that are a significant factor in shaping identity. This natural need to belong, when not acquired organically, is then sought out in anyone who will make the person feel like they belong. Terrorist groups are constantly searching for outcasts, loners, and rejects. This is primarily because those who are seeking connection tend to find their identity in whoever reaches them first.

### Cognitive Dissonance

Danzell, Yeh, and Pfannenstiel found that the groups committing violent atrocities also demand peace and equality.<sup>3</sup> This inconsistency in logic is called cognitive dissonance. Simultaneous, conflicting realities can cause an extraordinary amount of mental strain, because they are both fighting for dominance. If someone feels disparaged by their government and wants to fight for equality, then they may also want immediate, radical change. This is to send a message to those in power that their political mistakes will not be tolerated. When these messages are accomplished through actions like bombings, hijackings, and kidnappings, the terrorist claims to achieve equality of human rights by violating those same human rights of others. This level of cognitive dissonance according to White is most common in sociopaths, brain damage patients, and terrorists.<sup>4</sup>

### Dissatisfaction Regarding Life's Status Quo

While anyone can become a terrorist, not everyone will. The proper combination of circumstances must be present for such drastically violent actions to take place. Piazza seemed to draw correlation between economic status, racial status, and a propensity towards radical violence.<sup>5</sup> His conclusions stemmed not only from the United States of America, but also many European and Asian nations who noticed links between a low financial reputation and terrorist activities. He concluded that financial poverty may cause a person to take drastic actions towards immediate change especially if their ethnic group is discriminated against or experiences financial disparity. Excurra concurred with these findings, believing that ethnic segregation dividing people groups within the same nation increases the likelihood for those in a lower

---

<sup>2</sup> "Sociology and Psychology of Terrorism: Who Becomes a Terrorist and Why? | Office of Justice Programs," accessed February 17, 2023, <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/sociology-and-psychology-terrorism-who-becomes-terrorist-and-why-0?fbclid=IwAR0Yd8BAZpTAle3VqS4TkM31XLHxtE2ScRyxmYM4qqvIxIFaRgiExiNhpyE>.

<sup>3</sup> "Determinants of Domestic Terrorism: An Examination of Ethnic Polarization and Economic Development," accessed February 17, 2023, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/09546553.2016.1258636?needAccess=true&role=button>.

<sup>4</sup> Jonathan R. White, *Terrorism and Homeland Security* (Cengage Learning, 2016).

<sup>5</sup> James A Piazza, "Poverty, Minority Economic Discrimination, and Domestic Terrorism," *Journal of Peace Research* 48, no. 3 (May 1, 2011): 339–53, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343310397404>.

economic status to retaliate disproportionately to the harm suffered.<sup>6</sup> These feelings of inequity and discrimination can be real or internally perceived without any truth backing the claims. Either way, the damage that these thoughts and emotions can have goes far beyond hurt feelings.

## **Extremist Ideological Radicalism**

### **Terrorist Groups Radicalize Easy Targets**

Extremist political groups can be found at home as well as abroad. They are not solely created on one side of the political spectrum, and while many of them are seeking political change, some of them wreak havoc for havoc's sake. Brockhoff, Krieger, and Meierrieks found a common thread of values among Republican leaning terrorist groups that made a unified front against any governmental intervention.<sup>7</sup> In other words, small government should mean no government. A traditionally American value is an individualistic superiority of spirit. Every person should do whatever makes them the happiest in the end, whereas many Eastern cultures value the needs of the community above those of the individual. This American individualism can make convincing a hardened 'patriot' to revolt against those with power to be quite simple. It is easy to convince a narcissist who already believes that they are superior to their colleagues that only they have the right answer, and only they can implement change. Contrary to popular belief, this is not because right leaning individuals are not educated, thoughtful, or caring about their communities. These belief systems are engrained in everything that carries with it a patriotic nationalism: self above all else.

### **Slow Building: Extremism Doesn't Happen Overnight**

Unless significant brain damage is present, people do not wake up one morning and decide to bomb an airport or a school. Typically, radicalization is part of a multiple decade process that begins with a strong self of entitlement without accountability and ends with excessively disproportionate actions. Radicalization is stereotypically done through direct contact with extremist groups, but it can be done by family members, trusted friends, and even the internet.<sup>8</sup> By giving the victimized person a sense of purpose and community, which can be especially appealing to teenagers, one may be more willing to push established boundaries with their faith and identity. Homegrown terrorists are more familiar with how the youth of their nation are raised. This makes them more attune to the methods by which they can be radicalized.

### **Group Identity: Feeling like a Part of a Family**

Searching for a place to call home may seem like a platitude, however clichés are typically formed because they have been repeated enough times to find truth in endless recurrence. When an individual feels abandoned by those who were supposed to be encouraging, they may seek refuge in the arms of complete strangers, even those who do not have their best interests at heart. Hudson describes the typical leadership of a terrorist group saying that, "The

---

<sup>6</sup> "Group Concentration and Violence: Does Ethnic Segregation Affect Domestic Terrorism?," accessed February 17, 2023, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/10242694.2017.1315710?needAccess=true&role=button>.

<sup>7</sup> "Great Expectations and Hard Times," accessed February 17, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002713520589>.

<sup>8</sup> "Radicalisation and Extremism - How Children May Be at Risk," *Devon Children and Families Partnership* (blog), accessed February 17, 2023, <https://www.dcfp.org.uk/child-abuse/radicalisation-and-extremism/>.

presence of charismatic ideological leaders able to transform widespread grievances and frustrations into a political agenda for violent struggle is a decisive factor behind the emergence of a terrorist movement or group.”<sup>9</sup> Those without a strong foundation can easily be sucked into the deceit of a charismatic leader who promises power to the victim and justice to those who have hurt them. A desire for vengeance mixed with a false sense of structured power can easily sway someone to joining what seems like a brotherhood.

### **Just War Theory: Proportionality in Retaliatory Violence**

Saint Augustine around 400 A.D. created what is formally known as Just War Theory.<sup>10</sup> This doctrine holds that war must be a last resort, enacted by a legitimate authority, have a just cause, contain a probable likelihood of success, be administered with right intentions, maintain minimum civilian casualties, and be proportional to the harm suffered. These tenants have been applied to international wars, they can also apply to domestic and intranational conflicts. If a terrorist group plans to attack a building with no casualties intended, then the United States Federal Government would not be acting proportionally if they sent a warhead to demolish the terrorist’s home base.<sup>11</sup> The retaliatory actions of the government must be equivalent to the harm or possible harm that would be suffered by the terrorist’s actions.

## **Media**

### **First Amendment Right to a Free Press**

While terrorists cause mass chaos, an uninformed public can become its’ own weapon. An ignorant populous cannot make intelligent decisions. Unfortunately, the methods by which they can be informed are often a weapon that can be used by terrorist organizations to spread panic swiftly. Cornell Law School quotes the First Amendment of the constitution of the United States of America, which proclaims that Congress can make no law that prohibits or abridges the freedoms of the press.<sup>12</sup> With such unrestricted freedom, the press can publish current events in a timely fashion without the restrictions and filtering of the government looming overhead. This group holds nearly uncensored privilege to comment on such dangerous situations. This can cause fear to spread like a wildfire even when no terrorist activities have occurred. In some ways, this panic gives terrorists exactly what they are searching to achieve.

### **An Unobjective Money Grab**

Biased coverage of current events on either side of the political spectrum aid in further extremism. Cheimak and Gruenewald conducted a study surrounding the media’s portrayal of terrorist activities from 1980 to 2001 and compared this coverage to the events after the 9/11 attacks up until 2005.<sup>13</sup> They noted a significant spike in terrorism related media even after the panic related to the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks had dissipated. Cheimak and Gruenewald attributed

---

<sup>9</sup> “Sociology and Psychology of Terrorism: Who Becomes a Terrorist and Why? | Office of Justice Programs.”

<sup>10</sup> Eric Reitan, *Defining Terrorism for Public Policy Purposes: The Group–Target Definition* (Brill, 2013), [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004242029\\_012](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004242029_012).

<sup>11</sup> “Just War Theory,” obo, accessed February 17, 2023, <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo-9780199743292/obo-9780199743292-0050.xml>.

<sup>12</sup> “First Amendment,” LII / Legal Information Institute, accessed February 17, 2023, [https://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/first\\_amendment](https://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/first_amendment).

<sup>13</sup> “The Media’s Coverage of Domestic Terrorism,” accessed February 17, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07418820600985305>.

this increase in coverage to greed. The media had found their money-making, viewer-increasing content. Increased coverage of terrorist related issues, no matter how factually correct, was more watched and researched than ever before. Unbiased news coverage was a thing of the past. The easiest way to increase viewers was to make a distant threat seem imminent.

### **Conclusion**

Terrorism is not solely a foreign problem isolated to a few extremists, Islamic governments, or suicide bombers. These values can be found at home or abroad. Just as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn described this type of evil cuts through the heart of every living person. Isolating the values that could cause terroristic actions is impossible, because they are so rooted in the selfish, attention-seeking characteristics that make human beings who they are. These isolated people looking for change in the world around them may flock to groups that take them in like family. The media has a right to information disbursement, but they should use that power wisely to inform the public and not make a profit from fear and views. Panic and outrage are being sold on the world stage as a currency. Without a unified front opposing domestic terrorism, America truly cannot be one nation, under God, or indivisible as patriots proclaim while pledging allegiance to their country.



## Bibliography

- “Determinants of Domestic Terrorism: An Examination of Ethnic Polarization and Economic Development.” Accessed February 17, 2023.  
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/09546553.2016.1258636?needAccess=true&role=button>.
- LII / Legal Information Institute. “First Amendment.” Accessed February 17, 2023.  
[https://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/first\\_amendment](https://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/first_amendment).
- “Great Expectations and Hard Times.” Accessed February 17, 2023.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002713520589>.
- “Group Concentration and Violence: Does Ethnic Segregation Affect Domestic Terrorism?” Accessed February 17, 2023.  
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/10242694.2017.1315710?needAccess=true&role=button>.
- obo. “Just War Theory.” Accessed February 17, 2023.  
<https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo-9780199743292/obo-9780199743292-0050.xml>.
- Piazza, James A. “Poverty, Minority Economic Discrimination, and Domestic Terrorism.” *Journal of Peace Research* 48, no. 3 (May 1, 2011): 339–53.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343310397404>.
- Devon Children and Families Partnership. “Radicalisation and Extremism - How Children May Be at Risk.” Accessed February 17, 2023. <https://www.dcfp.org.uk/child-abuse/radicalisation-and-extremism/>.
- Reitan, Eric. *Defining Terrorism for Public Policy Purposes: The Group–Target Definition*. Brill, 2013. [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004242029\\_012](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004242029_012).
- “Sociology and Psychology of Terrorism: Who Becomes a Terrorist and Why? | Office of Justice Programs.” Accessed February 17, 2023. <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/sociology-and-psychology-terrorism-who-becomes-terrorist-and-why-0?fbclid=IwAR0Yd8BAZpTAIe3VqS4TkM3lXLHxtE2ScRyxmYM4qqvIxlFaRgiExiNhpE>.
- “The Media’s Coverage of Domestic Terrorism.” Accessed February 17, 2023.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/07418820600985305>.
- White, Jonathan R. *Terrorism and Homeland Security*. Cengage Learning, 2016.
- Солженицын, Александр Исаевич. *The Gulag Archipelago, 1918-1956: An Experiment in Literary Investigation*. Harper & Row, 1974.