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An increase in lone wolf terrorist attacks in recent years certainly warrants attention from counterterrorism experts and law enforcement professionals. Lone wolf terrorists may proceed to manipulate security gaps, but the proactive alliance among educated counterterrorism experts, law enforcement professionals, and community members might produce the preeminent silver bullet to identify the lone wolf terrorist and stop an attack from happening.

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Where Wolves: Understanding the Lone Wolf
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Perpetrators to Mitigate Future Attacks

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OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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Executive Summary

Title: Where Wolves: Understanding the Lone Wolf Terrorist Theory and Identifying Potential Perpetrators to Mitigate Future Attacks

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Thesis: Upon defining a lone wolf terrorist and identifying trends in target and weapon selection, one can surmise the necessary actions and policies to implement and attempt to mitigate the lone wolf terrorism element.

Discussion: During his second presidential term, President Barack Obama reiterated the United States' overwhelming concern with lone wolf terrorist attacks occurring on American soil. An increase in lone wolf terrorist attacks in recent years certainly warrants attention from counterterrorism experts and law enforcement professionals. Fully eliminating terrorism, whether orchestrated by the international networks or lone wolf terrorists, seems nearly impossible. Security gaps continue to exist and can be exploited by terrorist networks or the inspired individual. Dealing with lone wolf terrorists presents a different set of challenges for security officials as the proponents seemingly go unnoticed until after initiating an attack. Simply, the lone wolf terrorist employs violence or threatens to commit savagery against society's components to advance a political, social, religious, or other motive. Lone wolf terrorist actions and goals resemble those of terrorist organizations and may equally produce unwanted but necessary changes to daily life in exchange for better security. Although potentially influenced or indirectly trained by a terrorist organization (i.e., websites, periodicals), the lone wolf terrorist does not possess direct affiliation with the group and acts alone or with the support of no more than two other individuals harboring deviously identical intentions.

Conclusion: Mitigating lone wolf terrorism incidents within the United States requires better collaboration among counterterrorism experts and law enforcement professionals at every level. Enhancing intelligence collection and information sharing efforts gained through activities, such as monitoring the Internet for indicators, can only improve the odds of discovering a lone wolf terrorist before an unfortunate attack occurs. As counterterrorism experts and law enforcement professionals polish their lone wolf terrorism acumen, they can transfer their education to the surrounding community. Lone wolf terrorists may proceed to manipulate security gaps, but the proactive alliance among educated counterterrorism experts, law enforcement professionals, and community members might produce the preeminent silver bullet to identify the lone wolf terrorist and stop an attack from happening.

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Introduction

During his second presidential term, President Barack Obama reiterated the United States' overwhelming concern with lone wolf terrorist attacks occurring on American soil. His comments followed the July 2011 Norway attacks committed by the Norwegian far-right terrorist, Anders Breivik, who killed eight people by detonating a van bomb and then shot dead 69 summer camp attendees.¹ Breivik's actions highlighted how one individual stimulated by a radical and violent ideology can inflict numerous casualties rivaling or surpassing those associated with larger terrorist organizations.

An increase in lone wolf terrorist attacks in recent years certainly warrants attention from counterterrorism experts and law enforcement professionals. Unfortunately, significant incidents precipitated by terrorist organizations, such as the September 11th attacks and Madrid train bombings, often take precedence and corral most of the available resources aimed at capturing the culprits and deterring another terrorist attack. The increase in lone wolf terrorism may lead one to believe that the practice encompasses a new terrorism delivery tactic. However, the historical waves of anarchist, anti-colonial, New Left, and religious terrorism each witnessed episodes of lone wolves conducting attacks.² The lone wolf terrorist remains a dangerous threat to the public's safety.

Fully eliminating terrorism, whether orchestrated by the international networks or lone wolf terrorists, seems nearly impossible. Security gaps continue to exist and can be exploited by terrorist networks or the inspired individual. Yet, decreasing the instances of terrorism can occur. Dealing with lone wolf terrorists presents a different set of challenges for security officials as the proponents seemingly go unnoticed until after initiating an attack. Compounding the difficulties involves the lack of a universally accepted definition of what entails lone wolf

terrorism.³ An unclear definition may lead to improperly allocating resources meant to mitigate lone wolf terrorism by possibly treating similar events like school or other mass shootings with the same countermeasures and vice versa. Lone wolf terrorism requires its own universally accepted definition and categorization separate from the lone wolf criminal. Upon defining a lone wolf terrorist and identifying trends in target and weapon selection, one can surmise the necessary actions and policies to implement and attempt to mitigate the lone wolf terrorism element.

Defining Lone Wolf Terrorism

Before confronting lone wolf terrorism, one must possess an understanding of the term's definition. The discrepancies among the existing lone wolf terrorism definitions illustrate a glimpse into the complexities present when confronting the lone wolf terrorism issue. Reviewing the existing definitions presented from government, academic, and private organizational sources reveals little regularity in defining lone wolf terrorism. Someone not adequately familiar with lone wolf terrorism may categorize events like mass or school shootings as a lone wolf terrorist attack. Although those horrific acts bring about terror, one cannot label the instigator as a lone wolf terrorist without applying an appropriate definition.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) identifies lone wolf terrorism as a type of domestic terrorism.⁴ When defining domestic terrorism, the FBI utilizes the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) and 18 United States Code (U.S.C.) Section 2331(5) to structure its definition. The CFR piece depicts terrorism as including “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.”⁵ Additionally, 18 U.S.C. Section 2331(5) distinguishes domestic terrorism from international terrorism as a dangerous act

occurring primarily within United States territorial jurisdiction that endangers human life and appears intended to intimidate or coerce the civilian population; influence government policy through intimidation or coercion; and use mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping to affect the government's conduct.⁶ In its 2004-2009 Strategic Plan, the FBI defined lone wolf terrorists as anonymous homegrown terrorists motivated by formal terrorist organizations and capable of high profile, destructive attacks.⁷ The extreme anonymity hinders detection and prevention efforts by law enforcement.

The predominate researchers of lone wolf terrorism include Mark Hamm, Ramon Spaaij, and Jeffrey Simon. When defining lone wolf terrorists, these researchers agree lone wolf terrorists do not belong to a terrorist organization and do not receive orders through a chain of command. Hamm and Spaaij suggest the lone wolf terrorist acts alone to commit political violence.⁸

However, Simon maintains a lone wolf terrorist acts alone or with the support of no more than two others to further a political, social, religious, financial, or other related goal.⁹ Simon's definition seems more fitting when defining a lone wolf terrorist. Aside from the September 11th attacks, no other terrorist attack in the United States brought more carnage than the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing conducted by anti-government sympathizer, Timothy McVeigh. McVeigh initially received assistance from Terry Nichols to obtain and arrange explosives before individually detonating a Ryder rental truck parked in front of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building.¹⁰ Recognizing McVeigh as a lone wolf terrorist validates including those who received minimal support from no more than two others to conduct an attack. Consequently, Simon's definition best outlines the lone wolf terrorist among the subject's most predominant researchers:

Lone wolf terrorism is the use or threat of violence or nonviolent sabotage, including cyberattacks, against government, society, business, the military (when the military is not an occupying force or involved in a war, insurgency, or state of hostilities), or any other target, by an individual acting alone or with minimal support from one or two other people (but not including actions taken during popular uprisings, riots, or violent protests), to further a political, social, religious, financial, or other related goal, or, potential effect, upon government, society, business, or the military in terms of creating fear and/or disrupting daily life and/or causing government, society, business, or the military to react with heightened security and/or other responses.¹¹

Simply, the lone wolf terrorist employs violence or threatens to commit savagery against society's components to advance a political, social, religious, or other motive. Lone wolf terrorist actions and goals resemble those of terrorist organizations and may equally produce unwanted but necessary changes to daily life in exchange for better security. Although potentially influenced or indirectly trained by a terrorist organization (i.e., websites, periodicals), the lone wolf terrorist does not possess direct affiliation with the group and acts alone or with the support of no more than two other individuals harboring deviously identical intentions.

Examples of Lone Wolf Terrorists

Categorizing lone wolf terrorists allows one to differentiate lone wolf terrorists from each other and terrorist organizations. Simon indicates five basic types of lone wolf terrorists exist: secular; religious; single-issue; idiosyncratic; and criminal. First, the secular lone wolf terrorist commits violence driven by political, ethnic-nationalist, or separatist causes.¹² A second type defines the religious lone wolf terrorists as individuals initiating attacks in the name of religion.¹³ Single-issue lone wolf terrorists comprise the third category and commit attacks based on specific issues like abortion or environmentalism.¹⁴ The fourth category describes idiosyncratic lone wolf terrorists as those that appear to execute attacks to further some cause but realistically perpetrate violence due to extreme personality or psychological issues.¹⁵ Last, the fifth type identifies the criminal lone wolf terrorist as an individual motivated by financial gain.¹⁶

Simon's categories support his lone wolf terrorist definition. However, the criminal lone wolf category elicits skepticism. Terrorists, whether a lone wolf or from an organization, typically attack based on motivations other than financial gain. Criminal lone wolf terrorist attacks may yield responses like those executed by the other categorized lone wolf terrorists, but their desire to acquire substantial wealth quickly appears more in line with a bank robber, jewel thief, or mugger. The criminal lone wolf terrorist does generate terror but not due to the objectives normally associated with terrorism. Simon's lone wolf terrorism research remains valid but unnecessarily includes the criminal lone wolf terrorist. Removing the criminal lone wolf terrorist category can only enhance Simon's research by narrowing the focus on lone wolf terrorists determined by factors other than monetary gain and providing suggestions on how to deal with them.

Secular Lone Wolf Terrorist: Timothy McVeigh

Timothy McVeigh, with assistance from Terry Nichols, committed the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building bombing in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma on April 19, 1995.¹⁷ McVeigh parked a rental truck filled with approximately 5,000 pounds of explosives at the building's front entrance and left the scene before the bomb detonated and killed 168 people.¹⁸ McVeigh's anti-government views began after completing his Persian Gulf War deployment while serving in the United States Army. He believed the federal government forcefully deployed him to kill innocent civilians for no good reason.¹⁹

The 1992 deaths of Randy Weaver's wife and son at Weaver's cabin in Ruby Ridge, Idaho, and the 1993 raid on the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas additionally inspired McVeigh's anti-government rhetoric.²⁰ McVeigh and Nichols attended various right-wing militia movement meetings in Michigan. Along with other sympathizers, McVeigh rationalized

the federal government raids in Ruby Ridge and Waco as attempts to confiscate weapons and in violation of the Second Amendment's guarantee of the right for citizens to bear and keep arms.²¹ Even as McVeigh and Nichols attended anti-government functions, only Nichols knew of McVeigh's bombing plot. The fact that most of the world did not know of Timothy McVeigh until after the bombing highlights how the lone wolf terrorist's anonymity increases the difficulty of trying to prevent an attack from occurring.

McVeigh considered assassinating federal officials but felt detonating a bomb made for better news coverage and visuals.²² Ultimately, McVeigh launched the Oklahoma City bombing on the two-year anniversary of the Waco siege. Federal authorities placed McVeigh in custody two days after the bombing and subsequently arrested Nichols. While Nichols presently serves a life sentence in federal prison, McVeigh died by lethal injection in June 2001.²³

Religious Lone Wolf Terrorist: Nidal Malik Hasan

On November 9, 2005, United States Army Major Nidal Malik Hasan opened fire at the Fort Hood Soldier Readiness Processing Center in Killeen, Texas.²⁴ Shouting "God is great" in Arabic, Hasan randomly killed 13 people and injured 32 others before being wounded and taken into custody by law enforcement.²⁵ Deciphering Hasan's background and eventual Islamic extremist radicalization supports his categorization as a religious lone wolf terrorist.

Born in Virginia to Palestinian immigrants that ran businesses and became American citizens, Hasan felt obligated to serve his country and chose to join the United States Army upon completing college.²⁶ Hasan graduated medical school and completed his internship and residency in psychiatry at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, DC.²⁷ During his time at Walter Reed and Fort Hood, Hasan expressed opposition against America's wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, concern about potentially deploying to fight other Muslims, and support

for Islamic extremists.²⁸

Hasan's descent into Islamic radicalization revealed itself multiple times through his comments to work colleagues; yet, his superiors documented his comments merely as counterterrorism research on evaluation reports. Further evidence exists from email exchanges between Hasan and Anwar al-Awlaki, the radical American-born Islamic cleric and leader of Yemen's al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.²⁹ Al-Awlaki encouraged terrorist attacks against the United States and condemned any Muslim willing to fight other Muslims as disbelievers.³⁰ Al-Awlaki's radical interpretation of Islam attracted Hasan and fueled his decision to commit the shootings. Other than Hasan asking for religious guidance from al-Awlaki, the email dialogue did not reveal al-Awlaki directing Hasan to conduct the Fort Hood shooting.³¹ Before being killed in Yemen by a drone strike in 2011, al-Awlaki praised Hasan for his actions at Fort Hood and called him a "hero."³²

Hasan's situation displays an example of how a lone wolf terrorist exploits anonymity and the Internet. One may never expect a United States Army officer to possess radicalized Islamic extremist beliefs and eventually perpetrate a terrorist attack. Hasan's own superiors dismissed anti-American and support for Islamic extremist statements he made to other professional associates as part of his research. The Internet provided Hasan an outlet to communicate with other radicalized Islamic extremists, convey his sentiments, and strengthen his resolve to shoot American military personnel.

Single-Issue Lone Wolf Terrorist: Eric Rudolph

Although possessing anti-gay sentiments, Eric Rudolph's strong anti-abortion beliefs fueled his desire to detonate four nail bombs between 1996 and 1998. The collective bombings killed two people and injured approximately 120 others.³³ The most notable bombing occurred

at the Centennial Park during the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta, Georgia, where one person died and 111 others sustained injuries.³⁴ Rudolph proceeded to bomb an Atlanta abortion clinic on January 16, 1997; the Otherside Lounge in Atlanta, a lesbian bar, on February 21, 1997, injuring five; and a Birmingham, Alabama abortion clinic on January 29, 1998, which killed a Birmingham police officer working as a part-time security guard and critically injured a nurse.³⁵ Witnesses described Rudolph leaving the bombing scene along with identifying his vehicle license plate. No longer anonymous, federal authorities named Rudolph as the prime suspect in the other bombings and placed him on the FBI's Ten Most Wanted list.

Rudolph eluded capture for nearly five years after the Birmingham abortion clinic bombing. During his evasion, Rudolph relied upon his survivalist skills obtained while in the United States Army and dumpster pilfering to live in the woods near Murphy, North Carolina.³⁶ Rudolph's capture occurred on May 31, 2003, when a rookie policeman on patrol, not yet aware of Rudolph's identity, encountered Rudolph during a suspected burglary behind a store.³⁷ Rudolph avoided the death penalty by striking a plea deal with the FBI and providing the locations of dynamite, 250 pounds total, hidden throughout the North Carolina forest. The plea deal resulted in Rudolph receiving a federal prison sentence of four consecutive life terms and placement at the United States Penitentiary Administrative Maximum Facility (ADX) Supermax prison near Florence, Colorado.³⁸ Rudolph continues to justify the bombings as necessary to confront abortion.

Idiosyncratic Lone Wolf Terrorist: Theodore Kaczynski

Known as the "Unabomber," the reclusive Theodore Kaczynski best exemplifies the idiosyncratic lone wolf terrorist. Kaczynski, a recipient of a Harvard University undergraduate degree and a doctoral degree from the University of Michigan, abandoned a promising academic

career as a mathematician to target individuals connected with modern technology.³⁹ Between 1978 and 1995, Kaczynski either mailed or left 16 bombs that killed three people and injured 23 others.⁴⁰

For years, the FBI possessed only a composite sketch of the bombing suspect. In 1995, the unknown Kaczynski mailed several letters indicating his goals and demanding the publication of his 50-page plus, 35,000-word essay titled *Industrial Society and Its Future* within a major newspaper or journal in exchange for ending the bombings.⁴¹ *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* published the essay which called for a global revolution against the modern society's industrial-technological system effects.⁴² Kaczynski's brother contacted the FBI after noticing similarities between the essay and letters written from Kaczynski. The FBI finally arrested Kaczynski at a remote cabin near Lincoln, Montana on April 3, 1996.⁴³ His cabin contained one live bomb; several bomb components; 40,000 handwritten journal pages describing bomb-making and the Unabomber's crimes; and the likely original manuscript Kaczynski wanted published.⁴⁴

Kaczynski refused to enter an insanity defense plea. Subsequent interviews with Kaczynski led a court-appointed psychiatrist to diagnose him as a paranoid schizophrenic but competent to stand trial. Kaczynski remains serving eight life sentences at the ADX Supermax prison facility near Florence, Colorado.⁴⁵

Reviewing Kaczynski's case depicts how his need to communicate his rationale for the bombings compromised his anonymity. Kaczynski's published essay led to his capture after his brother alerted federal authorities. Lone wolf terrorists thrive on anonymity but like other humans, yearn for communication.⁴⁶ With the Internet's advent, counterterrorism experts and law enforcement professionals can monitor websites and chatrooms where potential lone wolf

terrorists congregate.

Criminal Lone Wolf Terrorist: John Gilbert Graham

Simon does not need to include the criminal lone wolf terrorist, such as John Gilbert Graham, within his lone wolf terrorist definition and categorization; however, describing this category allows the reader to comprehend why Simon includes this category and why its inclusion remains unnecessary. Although the criminal lone wolf terrorist's personal and financial motives differ from politically, religiously, or ethnic-nationally driven terrorists, their actions can equally impact society. For instance, John Gilbert Graham's desire to collect an insurance policy led to the United States' first major midair plane bombing. On November 1, 1955, Graham took his mother to the Denver Stapleton Airport for her flight to Portland, Oregon.⁴⁷ Prior to his mother's departure, Graham purchased a \$37,500 insurance policy on her life from an airport vending machine.⁴⁸

The plane crashed shortly after takeoff. The cause, unknown at the time, resulted from a bomb made of 25 dynamite sticks, a timer, and a dry-cell battery that exploded inside of the mother's luggage and killed all 44 people onboard.⁴⁹ Graham's selfish act set the foundation for how the FBI and other investigative entities reconstructed aircrafts and scientifically analyzed parts for potential explosive residue. Graham received the death penalty and died inside the Colorado State Penitentiary's gas chamber approximately two years after committing the lone wolf terrorist attack.⁵⁰

After reviewing the Graham scenario, one can see why Simon includes the criminal lone wolf terrorist within his definition and categories. Graham's actions did cause significant changes to airport security and aircraft crash investigatory procedures. However, those results remain products of Graham's fixation to obtain immediate wealth. Graham never intended to

coerce the airports, airlines, or FBI into altering any protocols. He concocted a plan with disastrous consequences for many innocent people solely to profit from his mother's death. Aside from committing a crime of significant magnitude and yielding drastic repercussions, Graham merely resembles the common thief and illustrates why Simon does not need to include the criminal lone wolf terrorist category within his explanation of lone wolf terrorism.

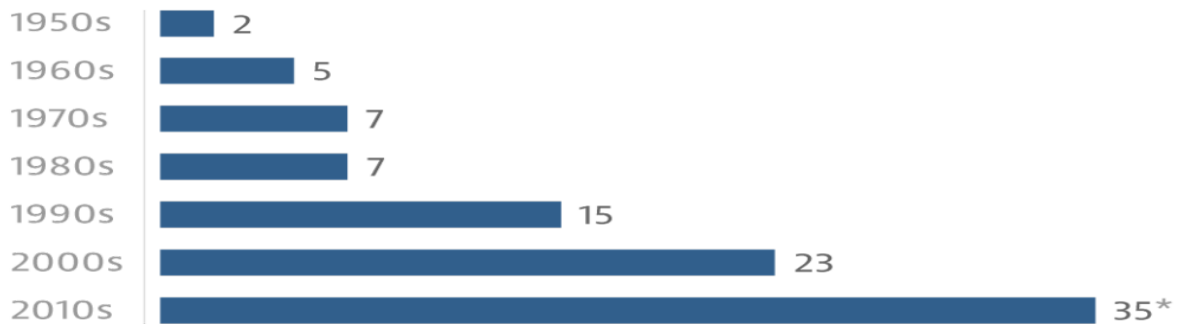
Understanding Lone Wolf Terrorism

The aforementioned definition and lone wolf terrorist examples provide the foundation for understanding the lone wolf terrorist phenomenon. Studying the topic includes understanding the current trends to devise the appropriate measures to mitigate lone wolf terrorist attacks or prevent them from occurring. Moreover, dispelling lone wolf terrorist assumptions, such as the belief that radicalized Muslims commit most the violence, serves of importance to ensure the necessary resources remain directed at the correct threat.

Increasing Attacks and Casualties

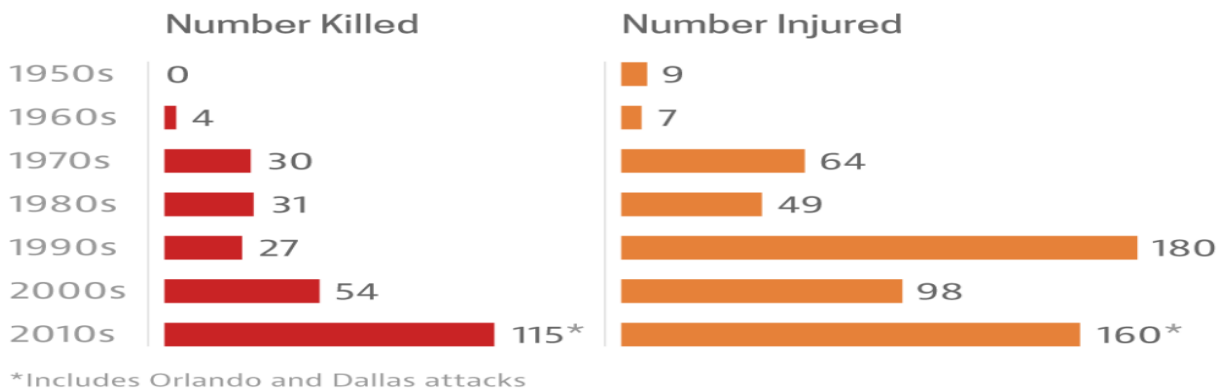
Lone wolf terrorist researchers Spaaij and Hamm created the following graphs to depict an increase in the amount of lone wolf terrorist attacks occurring in the United States along with the casualty numbers.⁵¹

Lone Wolf Attackers



*Includes Orlando and Dallas attackers

Lone Wolf Attacks



The first graph illustrates a continual increase in the number of lone wolf terrorist attackers performing an act in the United States since the 1950s. Apart from seven incidents occurring during both the 1960s and 1970s, each following decade experienced an increase in lone wolf terrorism. The second graph highlights the total number of casualties, both killed or injured, due to those lone wolf terrorist attacks. The attacks yielded significantly more injuries than deaths in almost each of the decades included within the research.

Although Spaaij and Hamm define a lone wolf terrorist as a completely solo actor receiving no support from another individual, the graphs still support the consensus research findings that lone wolf terrorism continues to rise in the United States. Their graphs and overall research do not include lone wolf terrorists like Timothy McVeigh or others that received minimal support to render terrorism. Simultaneously, the graphs visually depict how the lack of a universally accepted lone wolf terrorist definition skews research findings. Merely including McVeigh's kill count of 168 people and dozens of injuries can enhance graphical interpretations of how effective an impact a lone wolf terrorist can project.

White Supremacy, Far-Right Wing Extremism, and Sovereign Rights

One may be predisposed to believe the rise in lone wolf terrorist attacks stems from those inspired by radical Islamic extremism. While the number of lone wolf terrorist attacks motivated

by Islamic extremism continues to rise, the prevailing cause in the United States remains those driven by white supremacy, far right-wing extremism, and sovereign rights.⁵² For instance, the University of Maryland's Study of Terrorism and Response to Terrorism program compared a total of 66 criminal justice/military homicides perpetrated by Islamic extremists and far-right supporters from 1990 to 2015.⁵³ The study found those inspired by the far-right movement committed 54 of the homicides, equal to more than 80 percent.⁵⁴

The white supremacists, believing the white race outranks every other race, see their followers organize in racist hate-oriented groups ranging from the Ku Klux Klan to neo-Nazi skinheads. Adding to the movement's strength includes those individuals holding the same beliefs without formally associating with the existing groups. American militia leader and Ku Klux Klansman, Louis Beam, coined the term "Leaderless Resistance" in the 1990s to advocate individuals operating independently from a group or organization to further its cause without direct communication from a leader and circumvent police informants or infiltration.⁵⁵ Like Leaderless Resistance operators, lone wolf terrorists act alone or with minimal support to champion a motive. Dylan Roof, the perpetrator of the Charleston, South Carolina church shooting which left nine African-Americans dead on June 17, 2015, hoped to start a race war through his actions and exemplifies the white supremacist lone wolf terrorist.⁵⁶

The number of far-right groups exponentially increased during President Obama's tenure as more supporters mobilized due to economic uncertainty and fear of the federal government confiscating personally-owned weapons.⁵⁷ The militia movement primarily consists of armed, paramilitary groups seeking to counter any perceived intrusions from an invasive government.⁵⁸ Previously mentioned, Timothy McVeigh identified with militia beliefs and rationalized bombing the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in response to the Ruby Ridge and Branch

Davidian incidents.

Like militia members, the sovereign rights citizens consider themselves constitutionally exempt from government authority even though they physically reside in the United States. Per the Southern Poverty Law Center, as many as 300,000 Americans may be involved in the sovereign rights movement with approximately 100,000 of them seriously committed to the cause.⁵⁹ The father and son tandem of Jerry R. Kane Jr., 45, and Joseph T. Kane, 16, both sovereign rights believers, killed two West Memphis Police Department officers during a traffic stop, raising awareness among law enforcement about the lone wolf terrorists sympathizing with the sovereign rights movement.⁶⁰

Lone Wolf Terrorists and Radicalized Islamic Extremism

Closing in on the frequency of lone wolf terrorist incidents inspired by white supremacy, far-right wing extremism, and sovereign rights involves those lone wolf terrorists encouraged by radicalized extremist interpretations of Islam. Raffaello Pantucci, director of the International Security Studies at the Royal United Services Institute in London, suggests al Qaeda affiliated writer and strategist, Abu Musab Al-Suri, initiated the call for radicalized jihadi lone wolf terrorists in the late 1990s.⁶¹ Al-Suri's 1,600-page manifesto, *The Global Islamic Resistance Call*, completed in late 2004, reiterated his advocacy for a leaderless jihad consisting of individuals or small cells acting independently globally and united only by a common ideology.⁶²

Moreover, radicalized Islamic terrorist networks continue to embrace the lone wolf terrorist as an indirect method to further global jihad. Al Qaeda supported the lone wolf terrorist concept in a 2010 issue of its magazine, *Inspire*, and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) correspondingly promotes the lone wolf terrorist concept.⁶³ In recent years, ISIS claimed credit for lone wolf terrorist attacks where the terrorist organization possessed no direct involvement in

orchestrating the event.⁶⁴

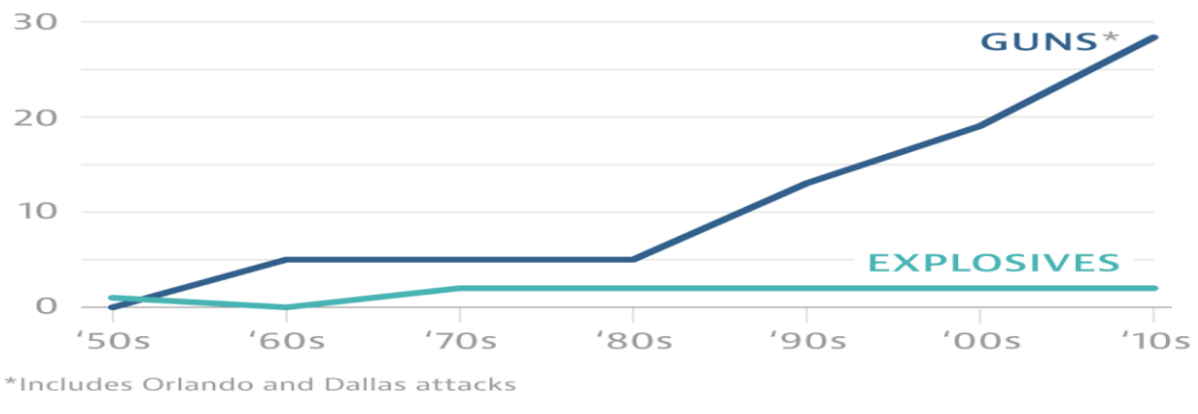
One example includes the May 3, 2015 Garland, Texas attack at a Prophet Muhammad cartoon drawing contest where local law enforcement engaged and killed Phoenix, Arizona residents and radicalized Muslim lone wolf terrorists, Elton Simpson, 30, and Nadir Hamid Soofi, 34, after the two drove to the event and wounded a security guard with gunfire.⁶⁵ ISIS also laid claim to the December 2, 2015 San Bernardino, California shootings committed by United States citizen, Syed Rizwan Farook, 28, and his lawful permanent resident wife, Tashfeen Malik, 29.⁶⁶ With no direct affiliation to a terrorist organization, Farook and Malik expressed their jihadism and martyrdom commitment by killing 14 people and injuring 22 others during a Christmas party at Farook's workplace before police ultimately killed the two after a vehicle pursuit.⁶⁷

Target and Weapon Selection

Lone wolf terrorists increasingly continue to target law enforcement and military personnel in the United States. Domestic lone wolf terrorists killed or injured 24 law enforcement officers between 2009 and 2013 alone.⁶⁸ Law enforcement casualty numbers continue to increase as lone wolf terrorists use movements against law enforcement personnel, such as Black Lives Matter, to justify attacks. Former United States Army Reserve veteran, Micah Xavier Johnson, killed five Dallas Police Department (DPD) officers while they patrolled a protest in response to two African-American men killed by police officers in Louisiana and Minnesota, respectively.⁶⁹ Prior to being killed with bomb attached to a DPD bomb disposal robot, the lone wolf terrorist Johnson expressed his desire to murder white people, primarily white police officers, as retaliation against police officers shooting African-American males.⁷⁰ Additionally, since 2009, lone wolf terrorists killed or injured more than 50 military members.⁷¹

Unlike other western countries where lone wolf terrorists employ hijackings or bombings, most lone wolf terrorists in the United States use firearms during an attack. Before 2001, lone wolf terrorist bombings killed or injured over 230 individuals in the United States.⁷² The number of those killed or injured by bombings between 2001 and 2010 decreased to only eight people.⁷³ During the same timeframe, 80 percent of the lone wolf terrorist attacks used firearms.⁷⁴ Researchers suggest the difficulties of obtaining bomb-making materials after the Oklahoma City bombing combined with the ease of acquiring firearms in the United States make shootings the preferred method for conducting an attack.⁷⁵ The below graph illustrates the increase of firearms over explosives being used by lone wolf terrorists.⁷⁶

Weapons Used in Lone Wolf Attacks



The graph reveals a striking disparity between the number of firearms utilized over explosives by lone wolf terrorists. Between the 1950s and 1980s, the number of firearms used by lone wolf terrorists plateaued but still exceeded the explosive usage figures. Since the 1980s, the firearms usage numbers indicate a steady, upward trend with a sharper increase beginning in the 2000s. Comparatively, the number of explosives detonated by lone wolf terrorists since the 1970s remains at the same level heading into the 2010s. Accompanying the ease of accessibility logic, firearms remain simpler to conceal, inexpensive, and easier to manipulate when contrasted

against using an explosive for a lone wolf terrorist attack. Those reasons likely contribute to why most lone wolf terrorists in the United States prefer firearms over explosives.

Current Counterterrorism Practices Not Fully Effective Against Lone Wolf Terrorism

The United States possesses various laws and policies to combat domestic and international terrorism. The FBI serves as the primary governmental agency tasked with responding to terrorism in the United States.⁷⁷ Upon review, certain counterterrorism practices conducted by the United States relative to lone wolf terrorist attacks need alteration including not solely focusing on radical Islamic extremists; sharing subject information throughout the federal, state, and local law enforcement levels; and ensuring state and local law enforcement entities possess access to the latest equipment meant to counter lone wolf terrorists and terrorist networks.

For instance, the Department of Homeland Security plans to rename its Countering Violent Extremism program to either the Countering Islamic Extremism or Countering Radical Islamic Extremism program.⁷⁸ The presented data indicates that although an increase in the number of radical Islamic extremist-inspired lone wolf terrorist attacks exists, white supremacy, far-right wing, and sovereign rights sympathizers commit most of the attacks. Completely shifting resources towards radical Islamic extremism ignores the primary white supremacist, far-right wing, and sovereign rights culprits of lone wolf terrorism attacks in the United States. Doing so further exposes an existing security gap for those willing to enact lone wolf terrorism in support of those mentioned ideologies and squanders necessary resources.

Another example involves the FBI's ability to share information with state and local law enforcement, which still suffers even after the 9/11 Commission Report addressed the issue. State and local law enforcement entities know their localities better than an arriving federal

agency.⁷⁹ The FBI failed to contact local law enforcement regarding Hasan's actions before the Fort Hood shooting.⁸⁰ Similarly, Tamerlan Tsarnaev, one of the two brothers responsible for the Boston Marathon bombing, came under the radar of FBI counterterrorism agents years before the attack.⁸¹ Local law enforcement arrested Tsarnaev for assaulting his former girlfriend but possessed no information about the FBI's concerns.⁸² If the local law enforcement possessed information about Tsarnaev during this encounter, the Boston Marathon bombing may have been thwarted.

The likelihood of local law enforcement first encountering a lone wolf terrorist prior to or after an attack remains a high probability. Some examples include Eric Rudolph's arrest in North Carolina and the Boston Police Department's encounters with the Tsarnaev brothers after the Boston Marathon bombing. Frequently, the radicalization of lone wolf terrorists occurs through the Internet. Unlike the FBI, most local law enforcement entities do not possess the necessary cyber equipment to monitor individuals when reasonable suspicion exists.⁸³ Providing local law enforcement with the monitoring resources to track lone wolf terrorist activities can simultaneously assist in deterring a potential attack orchestrated by a terrorist network. Current counterterrorism efforts, even if refined to include enhanced focus on the said areas, still face substantial challenges peculiar to the lone wolf terrorist phenomenon.

Challenges to Addressing Lone Wolf Terrorism

While the various forms of terrorism require attention, distinction between terrorist networks and lone wolf terrorists must exist to ensure properly identifying the deviant individuals. Since the 1940s, approximately 100 politically motivated individuals separately launched successful attacks in the United States.⁸⁴ Interest in lone wolf terrorism increased more than a decade ago as al Qaeda advocated for solo actors to commit terrorist attacks. Further, lone

wolf terrorists present a significant challenge to law enforcement and other security professionals due to their relative anonymity and ability to use the Internet to educate themselves on methods to administer an attack.

Much of the lone wolf terrorist's ability to launch an attack results from virtual anonymity. Even those lone wolf terrorists receiving minimal support benefit from remaining in the shadows. The ability to operate outside of a formal terrorist organization limits law enforcement efforts to identify the lone wolf terrorist before he or she executes an attack. Staying hidden enables lone wolf terrorists to scout targets, rehearse, and maintain the plot's secrecy until delivering the attack.⁸⁵ Concurrently, not participating in a formal terrorist network allows the lone wolf terrorist to devise attacks free from group pressure that may alter plans or stymie creativity.

Moreover, the Internet provides lone wolf terrorists with vast amounts of information to identify potential targets, research weapon selection, construct explosive devices, and read literature from like-minded individuals.⁸⁶ The Internet's ease of access, lack of regulation, extensive appeal to diverse audiences, and rapid information flow affords an arena for the lone wolf terrorist to thrive unlike at any other point in history. A lone wolf terrorist only needs a laptop or smartphone to access the Internet and read the plethora of terrorist propaganda or instructional manuals hovering around in the cyberworld.⁸⁷

Addressing Challenges to Mitigate Lone Wolf Terrorism Attacks

Throughout history, various lone wolf terrorists violently revealed themselves on many occasions to garner attention for their specific causes. Most researchers do not deny the existence of lone wolf terrorists, but disagreeing on a lone wolf terrorism definition stifles cementing a pivotal foundational piece necessary to mitigate lone wolf terrorist attacks.

Previously mentioned, the absence of a universally recognized lone wolf terrorism definition yields the first challenge to mitigating lone wolf terrorism. Agreeing upon a definition enables counterterrorism experts and law enforcement professionals to correctly allocate resources necessary to face lone wolf terrorists. Without its own definition, lone wolf terrorism may lose its priority as national security threat, be grouped with other dangers, and be incorrectly dealt with by addressing the matter with the wrong resources.

The reactive nature to lone wolf terrorism highlights the deficiency in proactively stopping an attack before it occurs. Too often, a lone wolf terrorist only makes the headlines once he or she executes an attack. Increased intelligence gathering and information sharing among the federal, state, and local law enforcement entities can alleviate this concern.⁸⁸ As the number of lone wolf terrorist attacks targeting law enforcement personnel grows, one may assume a fluid transfer of information exists. However, competing interests; lack of authorization; invalid security clearance levels; jurisdictional issues; and perceived undermining of another law enforcement entity's capabilities all impede collaborating on intelligence gathering and information sharing. Establishing intelligence fusions centers and joint terrorism task forces with participation from federal, state, and local law enforcement liaisons can familiarize each entity with the other's competencies and ensure that information is shared at all levels in a timely fashion.⁸⁹ Biometric data, prior arrests records, and travel patterns serve as some of the information pieces that when constructed together, can divulge a lone wolf terrorism plot before it takes place.

A second approach to decreasing lone wolf terrorism involves monitoring the Internet. Lone wolf terrorists increasingly utilize the Internet to devise attacks, exchange emails, or gravitate towards chat forums, websites, and social media outlets facilitated by individuals with

compatible ideas. Simon notions that lone wolf terrorists still possess the inherent desire for human contact and want to communicate their beliefs like James von Brunn did by posting racist writings for years on the Internet before killing a security guard at the Washington, DC Holocaust Memorial Museum in June 2009.⁹⁰ Counterterrorism experts and law enforcement professionals can conversely monitor Internet traffic to and from radical extremist websites and chat forums to identify lone wolf terrorists and uncover potential attacks.

Educating and working with the community also increases the chance of diminishing a lone wolf terrorism act. Law enforcement and community members must understand their current terrorism situation.⁹¹ Like local law enforcement, no one better recognizes suspicious activity than those residing within the surrounding community. Lone wolf terrorists thrive on anonymity, so solid relations between law enforcement and community members must exist to enhance recognizing those dubious actors. Law enforcement should also stress the importance of reporting suspicious activity regardless of perception. For example, neighbors of Farook and Malik noticed disturbing behavior prior to the San Bernardino lone wolf terrorism attack but chose not to report anything for fear of racial profiling accusations.⁹²

Conclusion

The lone wolf terrorist continues to accompany the wave of terrorism often attributed to the larger, recognized terrorist networks. While possessing motivations like those terrorist organizations, lone wolf terrorists act alone or with the assistance of no more than two other individuals to further a political, social, religious, or other cause. Lone wolf terrorists systematically exploit their anonymity at the expense of their victims, counterterrorism experts, and law enforcement professionals who frequently do not find out about a lone wolf terrorist's identity or plot until after an attack.

As lone wolf terrorist incidents persist domestically, counterterrorism experts and law enforcement professionals realize the danger lone wolf terrorists present to the country. Issues concerning where to focus upon and allocate resources hinder mitigating lone wolf terrorism threats. Globally, radical Islamic terrorist networks dominate the headlines by executing attacks under the guise of a war against Muslims. An increasing number of lone wolf terrorist attacks within the United States originate from those identifying with radical Islamic extremism, but policy makers, counterterrorism experts, and law enforcement professionals cannot ignore the leading proponents of lone wolf terrorism in the United States: the white supremacy, far-right wing, and sovereign rights sympathizers.

Mitigating lone wolf terrorism incidents within the United States requires better collaboration among counterterrorism experts and law enforcement professionals at every level. Enhancing intelligence collection and information sharing efforts gained through activities such as monitoring the Internet for indicators can only improve the odds of discovering a lone wolf terrorist before an unfortunate attack occurs. As counterterrorism experts and law enforcement professionals polish their lone wolf terrorism acumen, they can transfer their education to the surrounding community. Lone wolf terrorists may proceed to manipulate security gaps, but the proactive alliance among educated counterterrorism experts, law enforcement professionals, and community members might produce the preeminent silver bullet to identify the lone wolf terrorist and stop an attack from happening.

The lone wolf terrorist accompanied and continues to supplement the waves of terrorism witnessed throughout history. Confronting lone wolf terrorism presents a daunting challenge. Devising a common definition of what entails lone wolf terrorism and accepting the issue involves more than solely focusing on Islamic extremism remain critical to appropriately

addressing lone wolf terrorism.

Endnotes

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