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Ideas — Monday Memo: Terrorism in the Post-9/11 World

BY NICHOLAS ROMANOW on OCTOBER 29, 2018 • (0)

SUMMARY:

The threat of terrorism has dramatically evolved since the Global War on Terror. We now see an increasing frequency of terror attacks emanating from homegrown extremists. The American public should consider steps to reduce hate and extremism within our own borders.

BACKGROUND:

The past seven days were among the most eventful for U.S. counterterrorism since the immediate aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks. Early last week, package bombs were [intercepted](#) en route to the homes and places of work of political figures such as George Soros, Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama, and others, almost all of which are prominent Democrats. There were no injuries or fatalities from these attacks. Then, on Saturday, a [gunman opened fire](#) inside a Pittsburgh synagogue, killing 11 people inside that place of worship.

These events reflect a fundamental truth about counterterrorism, eloquently explained by former Admiral William McRaven at this year's Texas Tribune Festival: the American law enforcement and security apparatus must be right every single time; terrorists only have to get it right once.

The threat of terrorism against the American homeland has been a centerpiece of American foreign policy for most of the twenty-first century. Only in the past few years have counterterrorism operations been overshadowed by concerns of rising rivals such as China or Russia. Moreover, the nature of terrorism has shifted. Terror attacks now more frequently originate from within the United States versus from abroad. The Anti-Defamation League, which tracks homicides driven by extremism, [recorded](#) an all-time high in extremism-related murders in 2016 and [attributed](#) roughly three-quarters of these fatalities in 2017 to right-wing extremists.

For these reasons, terrorism will remain a high-profile threat facing the American people. The inherent asymmetry of terrorism provides a systemic advantage to the terrorist; the true success of a terror plot is not the casualties it inflicts but rather the fear and panic that is engendered throughout the public. Mass media aids this effect. Digital technology ensures that distant incidents are spread in real time across nations and throughout the world.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

There are no quick or obvious solutions to combating terrorism. Law enforcement and national security personnel will continue to diligently work against these threats, but pre-empting these attacks, especially when perpetrated by isolated "lone wolves," is tricky at best.



Academic – ish.

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Long term initiatives should be explored to reduce the strength and appeal of extremist ideologies. These ideologies sometimes have an economic component, though it should be noted that some of the most impoverished societies in the world, such as Haiti or Burundi, are not hotbeds for terrorist activity. The evolution of home-grown terror as described above as well as common sense disproves any notion that any particular religion or ideology—namely Islam—is inherently predisposed to provoking violence.

However, there is a grave trend of socially detached men being drawn to extremism. This can be blamed on social media, failed parenting, lack of opportunity, or any multitude of social ills. However, these problems do not inevitably lead to violence. People must be taught to hate over a long period of time; committing grand acts of violence is not a decision made overnight. Preventing and thwarting them won't be quick nor easy either.

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