On Responding to Right-wing Terrorism

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Both the US Congress and the Executive Branch are currently considering what additional measures may be necessary to prevent or at least inhibit campaigns of political terrorism from being waged within the United States. The immediate stimulus for these discussions was the bombing of the Alfred Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City on 19 April 1995. That murderous event was carried out, apparently, by a small group of individuals at the extreme right of the ideological spectrum.

It may be small comfort, but the US is hardly the only country among the western democracies to become both the target and the locale for rightist violence. In Europe, groups animated by racist, xenophobic, ultranationalist and anti-democratic sentiments have committed many acts of terrorism along with more prosaic forms of violence over the last few decades. Illustratively, while the Oklahoma City bombing was the single most lethal act of domestic terrorism ever to have occurred on American soil, the most deadly terrorist event in postwar Europe was the August 1980 bombing of the waiting room at the railroad station in Bologna an event that left more than 80 people dead. The two events are bound together by the fact they were both carried out by radical rightists.

In thinking about the western democracies in general, there has been a tendency to identify terrorism with three sources. First, there were the left-wing revolutionary organizations that became active in the late 1960s or early 1970s, most prominently the Red Brigades in Italy and the Red Army Faction in what was then West Germany. The US was not immune: witness the appearance of the Weathermen and the Symbionese Liberation Army.

The second source of terrorism with which the public has become familiar involves causes of a separatist/nationalist character. Terrorist violence involving the fate of Northern Ireland, the status of Spain’s Basque provinces and especially the national aspirations of the Palestinians in the Middle East has captured the public’s attention. Again, the United States was not immune, as the Armed Forces of National Liberation sought to achieve independence for Puerto Rico by waging a terrorist campaign on American soil for several years during the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Last on the list is terrorist violence carried out by groups claiming religious inspiration for their deeds. Far and away the most prominent cluster of such organizations are those identified with Islamic fundamentalism. This is no doubt inaccurate and unfair because terrorist acts have been committed by groups asserting, inter alia, Christian, Jewish, Buddhist and Sikh religious values. Still, the first thought to come to the minds of many after the Oklahoma City bombing was that some Islamist group was responsible.

To the degree that public perception shapes the formation of public policy, it follows that anti-terrorism legislation and other measures will have been designed with the preceding three sources in mind. But if terrorist violence now and in the future is also likely to involve the participation of right-wing extremist groups in Europe and America, it seems essential that members of both the public and the policy-making community develop some understanding of the nature of violent radical right-wing groups and the ways in which they differ from leftist revolutionary, separatist/nationalist and religiously-inspired ones. Such an understanding would provide urgently needed insight whether radical right-wing groups differ from the other kinds of groups in ways that would make a significant difference for those responsible for combating their violent operations.

In this article I would like to make two observations about the nature of right-wing terrorism in Europe and America. First, I wish to explore the nature of the groups themselves. It seems vital that we develop some sense of how ultra-right groups select targets for attack. In addition, we want to know something about the people likely to be recruited by these organizations and the milieu from which they emerge. Also, it seems especially helpful if we could understand what factors contribute to the defection or withdrawal of members from these right-wing extremist aggregations.

Second, I want to discover what links, if any, join European and American ultra right-wing groups to outside governments and movements. Anyone who has paid attention to the general debate over the nature of terrorism over the last few decades is aware that groups from different nations, sometimes with the cooperation of sympathetic governments, have cooperated with one another in carrying out their violent exploits. Initially considerable commentary was generated about international cooperation among Marxist-Leninist organizations and their putative sponsorship by the ex-Soviet Union or Soviet bloc states. More recently, as everyone is well aware, violent Islamic fundamentalist groups, with links to Iran or the Sudan, have been scrutinized in a similar fashion. In this context, it should be helpful to know if or the extent to which violent radical-right groups active in the western democracies have come to cooperate with one another in ways comparable to their leftist and Islamic fundamentalist counterparts.
common. Holocaust revisionism, a set of assertions to the effect that the Nazi extermination of European Jewry is a fiction, is a doctrine developed and disseminated by right-wing extremists on both sides of the Atlantic.¹³ The promotion of Holocaust denial serves at least two purposes. First, it helps to legitimize Nazism, for if the Holocaust never happened then perhaps Hitler's dictatorship, in whose name it had been established, was not so bad after all. Second, if the Holocaust is a myth, how has it come to be so widely accepted? The answer permits revisionists to point towards the existence of a powerful conspiracy at work in the Western democracies, a cabal not only strong enough to convince the public that the Holocaust occurred but also one so pervasive that its members control most economic and governmental institutions.

Identity theology is another doctrine whose itinerary has involved multiple cross-Atlantic journeys.¹⁴ From Randy Weaver at Ruby Ridge in Idaho to the adherents of the Vitt Ariskt Motstand (VAM) in Stockholm, supporters of this exotic religious view see the cities of North America and western Europe as increasingly dominated by ‘dusky hordes’ of not fully human ‘mud people’ who have displaced their racial superiors in social and economic life. Further, the displacement is hardly an accidental development. Instead, it is the product of ZOG (the all-pervasive Zionist Occupation Government, run from Tel Aviv and behind national governments in Sweden and the United States).

Identity ideas represent an exotic merger of racism with certain biblical conceptions. Odinism is a purely pagan belief system whose followers celebrate the Viking-era Norse pantheon. Originating in Weimar Germany and flourishing under the Nazis, the cult of Odin explicitly repudiates Christianity because of its Jewish roots in favor of blood and race visions associated with the Norse-Germanic peoples. From our perspective it is important to note that these days ‘Odinism travels well, linking racialist adherents in North America with like minded groups in Germany, South Africa and Scandinavia.’¹⁵

If Odinism travels well, what should we say about the skinhead phenomenon? The latter began in England as a white, working-class reaction to the long-haired youth movement of the 1960s and then spread to Europe and North America. Although the only things many skinheads on both sides of the Atlantic share are certain musical and sartorial preferences, there are well-organized skinhead groups, e.g. Naziskins and Reichskins, in major ‘Euro-American’ cities that are both racist and violent.

Other manifestations could be brought to bear here. But the important thing to keep in mind is that these ideological or cultural trends may reflect the emergence of a new kind of identity. Ordinarily we tend to associate the extreme right with ultranationalism; the term ‘superpatriotism’ is sometimes used. However, the types of radical rightist with whom we are concerned do not seem to be nationalists or patriots, ultra, super or otherwise. Rather, they appear to be developing a common identity that cuts across national boundaries and is built around the celebration of race and civilization.

In thinking about the organizational dimension in the relationship between the American and the west European radical right, the first thing we should observe is the number of groups involved. How many such organizations exist in the United States and the other Western democracies? One compilation, The Radical Right: a World Directory, reports a total of some 380 groups that were active during the 1980s.²⁰ Of that number 150 (39.4 per cent) were American in origin. In addition to sheer numbers, the American distribution stood out from the European in the relatively large number of such groups devoted to the anti-communist cause. With the end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, we would expect the American pattern now to look more like the latter: that is, a collection of organizations largely committed to various racist, neo-Nazi, neo-Fascist and doomsday religious concerns. (The comparatively many American groups can probably be explained without resort to de Tocqueville. A calculation made on a per capita basis would make the number less striking. Also, many West European governments have the ability to dissolve radical right groups thought to pose an armed challenge to democratic institutions.)

Now, what about the more overt linkages between these organizations? First, in some instances there is an exchange of personnel. For example, the editorial board of the Los Angeles-based Institute for Historical Review includes individuals from France, Germany and the United Kingdom. Aryan Nations of Hayden Lake, Idaho, holds a World Congress which hosts delegates from various European and Canadian organizations. There is also reciprocity. Leaders of American radical right groups, ranging from obscure Klan figures to David Duke, now visit their west European counterparts with some frequency. In at least a few instances the term ‘American’ belongs in quotation marks. There are cases, the late Ben Klassen — founder and leader of the Church of the Creator — comes to mind, where luminaries in the American organizations are in fact European émigrés.

There are also situations in which these contacts result in the formation of European offshoots or branches of American centered organizations. Followers of the conspiracy-minded cult leader Lyndon LaRouche, for example, established affiliates in France, Germany and Austria.²¹ The formation of the White Aryan Resistance in Sweden was stimulated by exchanges with its counterpart in Los Angeles. There are now Ku Klux Klan groups in several west European countries. But the linkage may run the other way. Gerhard Rex Lauck of Lincoln Nebraska defines his neo-
The United Nations’ Encouragement of Aggression and Ethnic Cleansing:
Time to Abandon the Right to Self-Determination?

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This article claims that the UN can be accused of encouraging — rather than merely appeasing — the ‘aggression’ and ‘ethnic cleansing’ that has occurred within the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and elsewhere. This is a conclusion that is based upon the UN’s pronouncements on self-determination which have led to both the creation of both a ‘right’ and/or ‘principle’ of self-determination in international law and a widespread belief that it is legitimate to use armed force — if not all means necessary — to achieve this end. The article goes on to analyse the alternative actions that the UN could take in order either to limit or end its encouragement of these crimes.

‘Ethnic Conflict tends to be bloodier than class conflict when it erupts. Questions of religion or language are more difficult to negotiate and compromise than material questions because of their all or nothing character’.¹

‘the debate ... is no longer whether people’s rights are recognized by international law ... [it] is about their content’.²

As the celebrations for the 50th anniversary of both the founding of the United Nations (UN) and the victory over those who committed ‘aggression’ and ‘ethnic cleansing’ during the Second World War come to an end, the view that the UN is appeasing those who perpetrate such actions today is a popular one.³ This article however goes beyond accusing the UN of this ‘sin of omission’ and accuses the UN of an actual ‘sin of commission’ — that is, of positively encouraging both ‘aggression’ and ‘ethnic cleansing’ in the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and elsewhere. Instead of calling for ‘tougher’ but temporary UN action in a specific place, the article calls for a more radical ‘solution’, in the form of a change to a ‘principle’ and/or ‘right’⁴ that the UN upholds. Put simply, the UN’s promotion, if not legalization, of the peoples’ ‘right to self-determination’, encourages both ‘aggression’ and to a lesser extent ‘ethnic