

Lone wolf terrorism definitions - essay



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Lone wolf terrorism and mass killings can be argued to be a global phenomenon today. The definitions incorporated in the literature concerning Lone wolf terrorism do not differ greatly. According to Spaaij (2010) in 'The Enigma of Lone wolf terrorism: An assessment' the term lone wolf terrorism encompasses terrorist attacks which are carried out by one person, who does not belong to an organised terrorist group. According to Spaaij, attacks which are carried out by couples or small cells do not qualify as lone wolf terrorists. The clearest definition from STRATFOR (a provider of geopolitical analysis and global intelligence) by Stewart, Scott and Burton (2008) of lone wolf terrorism is similar to an extent to the relation of Spaaij. STRARFOR states that lone wolf terrorism is defined as " a person who acts on his or her own without orders from or connections to an organisation."

Over the past decade, an increased number of lone wolf terrorist incidents have occurred over the world. Additionally, there are a diverse number of mass killings that have occurred, including shooting sprees by motivated individuals. Janet Napolitano the US Secretary of Homeland Security recently stated that individual terrorism is a problem which is also increasing.

Historical background

Lone wolf terrorism is known not to be a new phenomenon in our society. Comparable examples of lone wolf terrorism are highly visible during nineteenth-century anarchism. Mikhail Bakunin a Russian anarchist is known for stating that violence occurs by individuals due to the desire to participate in an activity which is revolutionary (Bakker and de Graaf 2010). It was suggested by Bakunin that those involved in small associations along with individuals should assassinate those who symbolise an existing social order.

Bakunin's interpretation galvanised terrorist incursion in multiple fragments of Europe. History illustrates that individual anarchists were involved in a number of incidents in opposition to establishments which embodied the significance of bourgeoisie norms and values (Kushner, 2003). Novak (1954) states that in the twentieth-century anarchists strongly believed that individual terrorism was both an approach which was rewarding and significant. In the United States during the latter period of the twentieth-century lone wolf terrorism was related to anti-government extremists and white supremacists (Novak 1954).

It is defined by Kaplan (1997) that leadership resistance is whereby an engagement of anti-state violence is practised by lone wolves and where lone wolf individuals are independent of association. A past representative of the Ku Klux Klan; Louis Beam (1992) also a known white supremacist, popularised the concept of leaderless resistance. Louis beam had a judgement that individuals should function independently of each other and should not seek direction.

During the late 1990s, Alex Curtis and Tom Metzger white supremacists dominated the expression ' lone wolf. (Anti-Defamation League, 2002). It was established by Curtis and Metzger that it is difficult to distinguish lone wolf terrorism compared to usual forms of terrorism.

My Interests/Why I have chosen this topic?

A number of reasons triggered my interest in mass killing and lone wolf terrorism, therefore, encouraging me to pursue this topic. The attack which occurred in Oslo, Norway by Anders Breivik contributes as a catalyst of

interest in lone wolf terrorism and lone mass killings. Anders Breivik killed seventy-seven people in two terrorist attacks. Additional interests of mass killing were attacks performed by mass killer Seung-Hui Cho who went on a shooting spree in his university in the United States. An additional incident of mass killing that further increased my interest was the Aurora cinema shooting that occurred in Colorado in summer 2012. What was interesting about these cases to me was the motivation to why these lone individuals resulted in such methods. I was also interested in exploring the psychology of these mass killers and lone wolf terrorists, the main question I wanted answering was; ' what did they all have in common?' According to Hewitt (2005), academic literature illustrates that the confines of lone wolf terrorism are habitually vague. Such examples are of attacks transmitted on individual particular motivation, such as mass killers or political assassinations. Hoffman (1998) states that a violent act committed by a lone wolf terrorist and a mass killer are similar however their rationale and motivation are different. There is a lack of academic literature comparing the psychological state of lone wolf terrorists and mass killers. Therefore an increased interest of mine is to analyse the commonalities of mass killers and lone wolves and what psychological factors contribute to their motivations and state of mind.

What questions have been prompted for my research project?

The questions that have been prompted for my own research project is; what are the motivational reasons to why mass killers and lone wolf terrorists resort to such methods? Furthermore, whether there are any psychological issues which mass killers and lone wolf terrorists suffer from; at their current

time or at any time in their life. According to 'What a killer thinks' by Cullen (2012) it states that; "...most of these mass murders are committed by criminals who fall into three groups" these three groups are the delusional, psychopaths and suicidal and depressed. The examples of case studies given in this article are of Seung-Hui Cho, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold.

Furthermore, according to Hewitt (2003) in 'Understanding Terrorism in America' he argues that the extent of psychological disturbance is significantly high among lone wolves.

Motivational reasons in relation to academic literature that I have read there is a diverse range of motivational reasons and patterns. 'The Enigma of Lone Wolf Terrorism; an Assessment' by Saiij (2010) states that the main ideological categories of lone wolf include ideologies such as White Supremacy, nationalism and Islamism. From literature I have learned that the main motivational factors for lone wolf terrorism are that of political ideologies or religious views. Stern (2003) argues in 'Terror in the Name of God' that "lone wolves come up with their own ideologies that combine personal vendettas with religious or political grievances." I will further analyze different profiles of lone wolf terrorists and lone mass killers which will further broaden the understanding of differing motivational factors of lone wolves and mass killers. A further interest of mine is what are the common weapons used in attacks? An additional question I ask is; what are the different methods of operation used by lone wolf terrorists and lone mass killer.

What is already known?

From enlarged study of academic literature and articles it is already known that both lone wolf terrorists and mass killers have suffered from psychological issues at one point in their lives. Martha Greshaw (1992) states in 'How Terrorists think'; that the strongest motivations of terrorism is vengeance. She states that individuals; " particularly desire to avenge not oneself but others, especially people thought to be responsible for injustices." Greshaw also states that " attention is a reward" this is also popular amongst those who have felt neglected by society or ignored. An example to support the claim that attention is a reward can be the profile of Timothy McVeigh. McVeigh was obsessed with his legacy whilst he was on death row. McVeigh desperately wished for his biography ' American Terrorist' to be published before his death, he strongly believed that he would go down in history as a great American patriot similar to Alexander Hamilton or Thomas Paine (Springer 2009). Furthermore, psychologist Todd Walker (2007) answers the question; " What drives a mass killer like Seung Hui Cho?" Walker responds that when an individual feels wounded they feel they have the right to seek "...revenge and restitution." This contributes one of many psychological reviews which relate to mass killers and the motivation behind their attacks.

Analytical studies have illustrated that a high rate of lone wolf terrorism occurs in the United States compared to any other western country. This was established by Hewitt (2003), who analyses the increase in victimization by lone wolves from 1955 following up to the years in 1999. Hewitt states that lone wolf terrorism has become an ascending threat in North America, he

also states that lone wolf terrorism; “ has greatly increased in recent decades.”

How others have approached similar research questions.

Other literature authors have approached similar research questions in diverse ways. The main aim for many authors is to establish the definition of lone wolf terrorism. However the motivation for lone wolf terrorism is also a key approach to the understanding of why individuals become lone wolves. Patterns of radicalization are also a research approach to which authors have conducted. I shall be analyzing this form of approach in relation to my research question related to lone wolf terrorism and mass killers.

Questions that haven't been answered

From diverse literature materials, I have noticed a trend which relates to questions about how to fight lone wolf terrorism. This can be viewed to be a weakness in prior research as there are a numerous range of unanswered questions. ‘ Preventing Lone Wolf Terrorism’ (Bakker and Graaf 2011) ask a question; “ How to deal with the threat of lone wolf terrorism and the challenge of identifying, targeting and arresting persons who act entirely on their own?” They state that this question has not been appropriately answered therefore causing the issue of “ how to reconcile fundamental principles of open societies with guaranteeing security to citizens.”

Academic literature of conventional terrorism emphasises the influence of leaders and training. The inequity between the discerned intimidations of lone wolf terrorism and the focus on contemporary terrorism which incorporate group form manifests the requirement for a greater theoretical

examination to facilitate a greater understanding of lone wolf terrorism. A weakness in academic literature is the issue that literature is vague about the degree to which contemporary accounts of terrorism can contribute to the development of performance of lone wolf terrorists. This therefore supports my consideration of a diverse range of question relating to the motivations, nature and the modus operandi of lone wolf terrorism.

Debates on topic area

There is a large debate on lone wolf terrorism and the issue of preventing it. Available literature explains that there is not a concrete answer to the questioning of whether lone wolf terrorism can be stopped and also how to deal with the threat of lone wolf terrorism. There are a small number of counter terrorist responses. According to Alex Shone (2010), the key factor of the UK's Counter Terrorism response regarding lone wolf terrorism occurrences is in knowing how attacks may occur however not whom would carry out the attacks. Shone believes that counter terrorism services need to adopt a method of using a sensitive detective system. An additional debate on how to deal with the threat of lone wolf terrorism relates to the factor that there are commonalities shared between lone wolves and therefore a way to deal with the this threat would be to scrutinize and work together with afflicted communities. Furthermore it is believed by counter terrorist responses that it would be; "...rewarding to compare and study the nature of potential triggers or catalyst events in the radicalization process of lone wolves." (Bakker and de Graaf 2011) It is illustrated in literature that counter terrorism responses can only partially reduce the threat of lone wolf terrorism as the challenge to prevent it is viewed to be huge. There is

increased analysis needed regarding the modus operandi of lone wolf terrorists and their radicalization process. According to Bakker and de Gaaf (2011) they state that it is crucial that “ experiences, data and policy makers and researchers” are present in order to develop various feasible responses to lone wolf terrorism.

The platform my sources provide

There are a number of platforms which sources provide for my dissertation. My sources illustrate clear definitions of lone wolf terrorism which give me a clear understanding of the concept. There are also a number of case studies and profiles of lone terrorists and mass killers who use methods of shooting sprees. This platform is significant to the extent that it enables me to compare and contrast the commonalities between lone wolves and mass killers. These sources have facilitated me to withdraw significant commonalties and also distinguish trends between lone wolves and mass killers. They have also enabled me to have a concise and clear understanding which has significantly contributed to my study.