

## MANAGING SECURITY RISKS IN A VIOLENT WORLD

by Mark A. Randol

In the space of a week in March 2021, mass shootings in the United States at health spas in Atlanta, Georgia and at a grocery store in Boulder, Colorado killed eight and ten persons, respectively.

This was a terrible week, but not the worst week of gun violence America has suffered. During one week in the summer of 2019, eleven multiple shootings occurred culminating in the attack at the Gilroy Garlic Festival in California. They took place in six different states and the District of Columbia. Sixteen were killed and 58 wounded in these attacks.<sup>1</sup> Then, the following week, there were two more mass shootings – in El Paso, Texas and Dayton, Ohio – that took the lives of 31 and wounded 51 more.<sup>2</sup>

Last year, gun violence killed nearly 20,000 Americans more than any other year in the last two decades.<sup>3</sup> In the last five years, there have been at least 30 mass shootings resulting in four or more fatalities each, according to data compiled by the Violence Project.<sup>4</sup> As families grieve, politicians argue fruitlessly over what to do about America's epidemic of firearm deaths.

Leaders of public and private sector organizations have important responsibilities for the safety and security of their people, assets, and operations. They do not have the luxury of extended political debate over gun laws and cannot delegate their responsibilities to others. The purpose of this article is to describe the adversaries and threats that exist in this violent world, remind leaders that security risks are real, and that managing those risks is critically important.

It would be tempting for citizens of other Western countries to assume mass murder is mostly an American phenomenon. It is true that Americans, who make up under five percent of the

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<sup>1</sup> "Mass Shootings in 2019," *The Gun Violence Archive*, accessed at: <https://www.gunviolencearchive.org/reports/mass-shooting>.

<sup>2</sup> Bonnie Berkowitz, et al., "More and Deadlier: Mass Shooting Trends in the United States," *The Washington Post*, August 5, 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Reis Thebault and Danielle Rindler, "Shootings Never Stopped During the Pandemic: 2020 Was the Deadliest Gun Violence Year in Decades," *The Washington Post*, March 24, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> Jack Healy, et al., "An Immigrant Family Caught Up in a Distinctly American Tragedy," *The New York Times*, March 27, 2021.

world's population, own 42 percent of its firearms. Moreover, between 1996-2012, thirty-one percent of mass shootings worldwide were committed by Americans.<sup>5</sup> But considering all types of mass murder events regardless of motive and weapon(s) used, one finds that numerous deadly acts have also occurred within the nations of Western Europe, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand.

In 2020, terrorist stabbing attacks in Great Britain, Canada, France, and Germany killed nine and wounded twelve others. Also last year, two terrorist shootings in Austria and Germany took the lives of 14. In Canada, a stabbing attack killed one while 22 more were killed in a shooting and arson spree.

A review of terrorist incidents of the past decade reveals that many of the deadliest attacks in the world occurred *outside* the United States, including:

- **Norway.** 22 July 2011. A right-wing extremist, Anders Breivik, committed two sequential domestic terrorist attacks in Oslo, the country's capital, and at an island outside the city. The first attack was a car bomb explosion near the offices of the Norwegian Prime Minister. The second attack occurred less than two hours later at a Worker's Youth League summer camp on the island of Utøya. Breivik, dressed in a homemade police uniform and showing false identification, opened fire at the participants. Altogether, 77 were killed – a horrific tragedy for a small country which lost more on that day as a percentage of its population than the number of Americans killed on 9/11 as a percentage of the U.S. population.
- **France.** 13 November 2015. A series of coordinated Islamist terrorist attacks took place in and around Paris. Three suicide bombers struck outside the Stade de France in Saint-Denis, during an international football match. Another group of attackers then fired on crowded cafés and restaurants in Paris. A third group carried out another mass shooting and took hostages at a rock concert attended by 1,500 people in the Bataclan Theater. The attackers killed a total of 130 people. Another 416 people were injured
- **France.** 14 July 2016. A Tunisian living in France drove a cargo truck into crowds of people celebrating Bastille Day on the *Promenade des Anglais* in Nice killing 86 people and injuring of 458 others.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

- **Germany.** 19 December 2016. A Tunisian man hijacked a truck, killed its Polish driver, and then plowed into a popular Christmas Market near Berlin's Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church killing 12 and injuring dozens of others.
- **Great Britain.** 3 June 2017. Three men armed with butcher knives jumped from a van on London Bridge and initiated a stabbing attack killing eight and injuring 48, including four unarmed police officers.
- **Spain.** 17 August 2017. Members of an Islamic State cell conducted vehicle ramming attacks on the La Rambla pedestrian mall in Barcelona and in the city of Cambrils that killed 15 and injured 130.
- **Italy.** 3 February 2018. In the city of Macerata, a 28-year-old man, Luca Traini, conducted a "drive-by" shooting seriously wounding six African migrants.
- **Canada.** 23 April 2018. Alek Minassian, a self-identified "Incel" (involuntary celibate), rammed his vehicle against pedestrians along Yonge Street in Toronto killing ten.
- **New Zealand.** 15 March 2019. An Australian right-wing extremist committed two mass shootings during Friday Prayers at mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand. 50 were killed.
- **The Netherlands.** 18 March 2019. Four people were killed and six others wounded in a mass shooting on a tram in Utrecht, in the Netherlands.
- **Austria.** 2 November 2020. A gunman opened fire with assault rifles in six places within central Vienna, killing four civilians and wounding 23 others. The perpetrator was killed by police, while wearing a fake suicide vest. The attacker was identified as Kujtim Feizullai, an Islamic State supporter.

It is essential for leaders of organizations to understand that they cannot rely solely on local and national police forces and intelligence agencies to prevent violent criminal and terrorist acts. There have been successes, such as these:

- In July 2017, the Australian Federal Police arrested four suspects in Sydney who were part of Islamic State-inspired plotting to bomb a commercial airliner and to conduct a poison gas attack.
- On April 15, 2020, German police arrested four Tajik nationals on suspicion they belonged to an Islamic State terror cell planning attacks on U.S. forces stationed in Germany. The group

had already acquired firearms and ammunition, as well as secured directions and precursors for making a bomb from the Internet. The leader of the group was already in German custody.

- On October 8, 2020, the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) announced the arrests of 13 men suspected of orchestrating a domestic terror plot to kidnap Gretchen Whitmer, the governor of Michigan, and otherwise violently overthrow the state government. The suspects were tied to a paramilitary militia group that called themselves the “Wolverine Watchmen” which was founded by two of the suspects.
- In February 2021, authorities in Denmark arrested 13 people on suspicion of planning "one or more" terrorist attacks, according to the Danish Security and Intelligence Service. The suspects are charged with acquiring ingredients and components for manufacturing explosives and firearms.

Nevertheless, despite the best efforts of law enforcement and the billions spent by these agencies, deadly and destructive attacks still occur. In addition to those listed further above, security officials were unable to prevent these attacks:

- **The Netherlands.** 9 April 2011. Six people were killed by a gunman who entered the Ridderhof mall in Alphen aan den Rijn. Using a rifle, 24-year-old Tristan van der Vlis shot several people and then killed himself. 17 were also wounded.
- **France.** 7 January 2015. Two heavily armed gunmen entered the Paris offices of the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* and killed 12 people including 2 police officers.
- **Belgium.** 22 March 2016. Three coordinated suicide bombings occurred in Brussels – two at the international airport in Zaventem and one at the Maalbeek metro station in the center of the city. 35 were killed, including the three perpetrators, and more than 300 people were injured.
- **United States.** 12 June 2016. Omar Mateen, a 29-year-old from an Afghan immigrant family, declared his allegiance to the Islamic State then committed a mass shooting at the Pulse Nightclub in Orlando, Florida killing 49.
- **Great Britain.** 22 May 2017, a British Muslim detonated an explosive device filled with nuts and bolts at the exit of Manchester Arena following a concert by American singer Ariana Grande. 23 were killed and 250 injured.

- **United States.** 1 October 2017. A 64-year-old man, Stephen Paddock, armed with 22 assault rifles fired over 1,000 rounds from a suite in the Mandalay Bay Hotel on concertgoers on the Las Vegas Strip killing 58 and wounding 546 others.
- **Germany.** 19 February 2020. A far-right extremist killed eleven people and wounded five others in a terrorist shooting spree at two shisha bars in the city of Hanau, near Frankfurt.
- **Canada.** 18-19 April 2020. Gabriel Wortman dressed in an authentic Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) uniform and driving a mocked-up police cruiser, went on a 13-hour shooting rampage through rural Nova Scotia and set fires at 16 locations within the Canadian province. Wortman killed 22 and injured three others before the RCMP shot and killed him.

## MANAGING RISK

Managing risk is one of the biggest challenges for leaders. The risk of a terrorist or criminal attack against an organization is a function of the likelihood that the security threat will be realized and its potential consequences. However, threats are complex, threat actors are strategic and adaptive in their behaviors, and assessing the likelihood and gauging potential consequences of the various threats can be challenging. Leaders must assume threat as a constant in order to manage risk efficiently. They must assume an attack could happen any day and should work proactively to mitigate or prevent it.

Failure to manage risks can be catastrophic. Pan American World Airways (Pan Am) was once the largest airline in the world and the unofficial flag air carrier of the United States. Its pioneering use of jet aircraft and later jumbo jets along with an advanced reservation system helped shape the commercial airline industry. An important part of Pan Am's success was its highly trained staff of pilots, flight crews, mechanics, and support staff operating throughout the world. However, it failed to manage the risks of terrorism in its operating environment. In December 1991, not long after two devastating terrorist attacks – the commandeering of Pan Am Flight 73 on the tarmac in Karachi, Pakistan and the in-flight bombing of Pan Am 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland – the airline ceased operations.

Managing risk is particularly difficult when making decisions about minimizing the risks posed by *infrequent* events. Many regard events such as the 9/11 attacks as "Black Swan" events. That is, they are high-profile, hard-to-predict, and rare events beyond normal expectation. It is tempting to assume that such events “won’t happen here.”

On September 10, 2001, a day before the 9/11/ attacks, the risk of multiple hijackings for the purpose of using the aircraft to crash into prominent American buildings was very low. Moreover, no one had imagined this suicidal method of operation (MO). Therefore, this MO was not addressed in any risk assessment, policy, or procedure before September 11, 2001.

The 9/11 Commission which studied the attacks stated in its report, “*We believe the 9/11 attacks revealed four kinds of failures: in imagination, policy, capabilities and management.*”<sup>6</sup> Inability to imagine threats (regardless of statistical probability) is likely to result in such failures. Accordingly, it is important to view the likelihood of threats not only in terms of statistical probability but from an adversarial perspective in the context of the security system in place.

Consider this “far-fetched” terrorist event that occurred in the 1990’s and few imagined. In March 1995, members of the cult movement Aum Shinrikyo released the nerve agent, sarin, in five coordinated attacks on three lines of the Tokyo Metro during rush hour. Thirteen died in the attacks, more than 50 were gravely injured, and as many as 6,000 reported various other injuries.<sup>7</sup> It was the worst terrorist attack in modern Japanese history.

Sarin is a colorless, odorless liquid used as a chemical weapon due to its extreme potency as a nerve agent. Exposure is lethal even at very low concentrations. Death can occur within one to ten minutes after direct inhalation. It was developed in 1938 in Germany by scientists at IG Farben who were attempting to create stronger pesticides.<sup>8</sup> Later, sarin became a component of the chemical warfare programs of the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War until these programs were abandoned. In March 1988, Saddam Hussein’s Air Force bombarded the Kurdish city of Halabja in Northern Iraq with bombs containing sarin. An estimated 5,000 people died in those attacks.<sup>9</sup> The Assad regime in Syria used sarin on multiple occasions against its own citizens including the massive August 2013 attack that killed more than 1,400 civilians in the Damascus suburb of Ghouta.<sup>10</sup>

Aum Shinrikyo (“Supreme Truth”), founded by Shoko Asahara in 1984, was a cult that combined a strange mix of Buddhist and Hindu meditation along with Christian and apocalyptic

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<sup>6</sup> The National Commission on Terrorist Attacks on the United States, “9/11 Commission Report,” 2004, p. 339.

<sup>7</sup> Justin McCurry, “Japan Executes Sarin Gas Attack Cult Leader Shoko Asahara and Six Members,” *The Guardian*, July 5, 2018.

<sup>8</sup> Richard J. Evans, *The Third Reich at War, 1939-1945*, (London: Penguin, 2008), p. 669.

<sup>9</sup> “1988: Thousands die in Halabja gas attack,” *BBC News*. March 16, 1988.

<sup>10</sup> Alicia Sanders-Zakre, “What You Need to Know About Chemical Weapons Use in Syria,” Arms Control Association, March 14, 2019.

teachings, yoga, and the occult. At one point, it had more than 10,000 followers in Japan. How was it possible that such a bizarre group could produce a nerve agent that today is designated a “weapon of mass destruction” and then successfully release it at a mass transportation venue? Until Aum Shinrikyo did so, only nation-states had managed the complex chemical production processes. Who in Japan or anywhere else in the world could imagine that a strange cult could pull off such a sophisticated and devastating terrorist attack?

Aum Shinrikyo did manage to pull off the attack. On March 20, 1995, five cult members carried the liquid sarin in plastic bags wrapped in newspaper. Each perpetrator carried umbrellas with sharpened tips. At prearranged metro stations, they dropped the sarin packets puncturing them several times with the sharpened tip of the umbrella and then exited the train cars. They left the punctured packets on the floor allowing the deadly sarin to leak out into the train cars and metro stations.

Was this a “Black Swan” event? In fact, a more apt nomenclature applies to devastating incidents such as this. These are “Pink Flamingo” events – *predictable* but often overlooked events that can yield disastrous results. They are fully viable scenarios. But they are all-too-frequently disregarded by those responsible for making decisions about mitigating security threats or natural disasters. The 1995 sarin attack in the Tokyo Metro is a classic “Pink Flamingo” scenario – a predictable, but overlooked threat.

Following any such attack in the future, commentators, policy makers, and the public will no doubt demand to know why the threat scenario was not taken seriously enough by the leaders of the targeted organization to warrant appropriate mitigating measures.

## **ADVERSARIES AND THE THREATS THEY POSE**

The term “threat” refers to the sources and means of potential attacks against the people, assets, and operations we wish to protect. In other words, who are the adversaries? How might they attack? The threat needs to be analyzed and understood fully by decision makers. It is a precondition for assessing risk and designing and implementing security countermeasures.

There are two broad categories of adversaries – internal and external – that can threaten an organization. Internal adversaries (often referred to as the “insider threat”) are members of the organization’s community. They have inside knowledge and credentials that give them both access and insight into how to defeat the organization’s security system. This makes them

potentially formidable adversaries. However, insiders also undergo pre-employment vetting and are under various degrees of observation by their colleagues and others while they are at work.

External adversaries have limited or no information about the organization's internal operations which complicates their attack planning. Thus, external adversaries must conduct surveillance and/or engage in other information collection activities which exposes them to detection by alert and well-trained police and security officers, employees, or members of the public. Having said this, large, publicly-accessible buildings, venues, and facilities – in particular transportation nodes (airports, subways, train stations, etc.) – are relatively soft targets. They offer numerous opportunities for simple attack scenarios that require little or no planning, especially if the adversary is indifferent to escape.

The motivations of external and internal adversaries can run the gamut from ideology, greed, anger, or mental illness.

## **The Insider Threat**

### *Malicious Insiders*

There are many dangers to people, assets, and operations posed by “malicious insiders.” There may be individuals (normally an employee) who have adopted, and are prepared to act on, a violent extremist ideology, or who become angry and highly agitated to the point of acting violently; or who suffer from mental illness and may also act violently.

Violence in the workplace, motivated by anger or revenge, is not uncommon and a serious challenge for organizations that manage groups of employees. One of the most notorious examples of a malicious insider attack occurred on November 5, 2009. Major Nidal Malik Hassan, a U.S. Army psychiatrist, entered the Soldier Readiness Processing Center at Fort Hood, Texas armed with an FN Five-Seven automatic pistol and shot and killed 13 fellow soldiers and injured 30 others. It was the deadliest mass shooting at an American military base in U.S. history.

Three recent deadly incidents further illustrate the threat of workplace violence:

- On February 15, 2019, a mass shooting took place at the Henry Pratt Company in Aurora, Illinois. The shooter was identified as 45-year-old Gary Montez Martin. He had recently been terminated from his job at the company. Martin murdered five of his former colleagues before he was killed by police after a moving gun battle lasting 90 minutes.

- On May 31, 2019, a longtime city employee, DeWayne Craddock, entered a packed building of the Virginia Beach, Virginia Municipal Center using his own security pass and went floor-to-floor "indiscriminately" killing 11 co-workers and a contractor before police shot him dead during a fierce gun battle.
- On October 3, 2019, Mickaël Harpon stabbed and killed four officers and wounded another at the central police headquarters in Paris, France. Harpon was later shot dead by police. Police sources said the assailant was "in conflict" with his superiors.

Throughout Europe there is deep concern about acts of violence in the workplace. The European Working Conditions Surveys (EWCS) by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions have systematically measured the prevalence of different forms of work-related violence across all EU countries at different points of time. The results of the Fourth EWCS revealed that 5% of workers report having been personally subjected to violence either from fellow workers or from others.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to deadly attacks, malicious insiders can also destroy vital property and equipment and cause serious disruptions of operations, as illustrated by this incident:

On September 26, 2014, Brian Howard, a contract Information Technology (IT) technician used his credentials to enter the basement of the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) Aurora, Illinois Air Route Traffic Control Center (Chicago Center). He was carrying a suitcase full of flammables which he used to start a fire near computer equipment critical to the facility's operations. This led to a loss of radar services and communications resulting in the grounding of 2,000 aircraft and several days of substantially impaired air traffic service in one of the biggest regions in the United States.

## **The External Threat**

External threats are intentional acts of damage or destruction that originate from outside the organization that exploit security vulnerabilities.

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<sup>11</sup> European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, *Workplace Violence and Harassment: a European Picture*, p. 46.

### *Foreign Terrorists*

For the past 25 years, the principal foreign terrorist threat to the United States has been posed by groups and individuals associated with the global jihadist movement.<sup>12</sup> But following the adoption of greatly enhanced security and intelligence measures after the 9/11 attacks, the foreign terrorist threat within the American homeland has evolved. In its most recent homeland threat assessment,<sup>13</sup> the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) notes:

The primary threat to the Homeland from foreign terrorist organizations will manifest as “inspired” attacks. Foreign terrorist organizations seek to inspire violent extremism in the United States and continue to use social media and other online platforms to call for attacks against the United States.<sup>13</sup>

Notable attacks by American citizens or lawful permanent residents who were inspired by the propaganda of jihadist groups include the December 2, 2015 mass shooting attack at the San Bernardino County (California) Health Department’s Inland Regional Center by Rizwan Farook, an American citizen, and his Pakistani wife, Tashfeen Malik, which left 14 dead; and the

June 12, 2016 mass shooting at the Pulse Nightclub in Orlando, Florida by Omar Mateen, an Afghan-American, which resulted in 49 fatalities.

The jihadist threat will remain an acute security challenge for the nations of Western Europe as well. Six jihadist-inspired terrorist attacks took place in Europe between late September and late November of last year—three in France, and one each in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. These included:

- **Germany.** 4 October 2020, a Syrian asylum-seeker known to authorities as an extremist stabbed two tourists in Dresden killing one and wounding the other.
- **France.** 29 October 2020. A Tunisian man who illegally entered the EU a month before, stabbed and killed three people at the Notre Dame Basilica in Nice. Police officials said he shouted “Allahu Akbar” before he was shot by police and detained.

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<sup>12</sup> The term “jihadist” describes radicalized individuals using Islam as an ideological and/or religious justification for their belief in the establishment of a global caliphate, or jurisdiction governed by a Muslim civil and religious leader known as a caliph. Notable groups within the global jihadist movement who have committed or inspired terrorist acts are the Islamic State (ISIS) and Al Qaeda (AQ) and its various franchises.

<sup>13</sup> Department of Homeland Security, “Homeland Threat Assessment, October 2020, p. 19.

- **Austria.** 2 November 2020. A gunman opened fire on people in the center of Vienna, killing four and injuring 22, before being shot and killed by police. Authorities identified him as Kujtim Fejzulai, a 20-year-old with dual Austrian and North Macedonian nationality who had previously been imprisoned for attempting to join the Islamic State.

Civil wars in Syria and Iraq have particularly complicated the counterterrorism challenge for western European nations. It is estimated that at least 5,000 jihadist foreign fighters came from Europe. Over 1,500 have already returned home.<sup>14</sup> In addition, many Western countries have refused to repatriate their citizens languishing in detention centers in Syria, providing groups like the Islamic State and al-Qaida with ample fodder for propaganda to recruit new members and encourage jihadist sympathizers to launch attacks in their home countries. France, for example, was the largest source of Western fighters to Iraq and Syria, with an estimated 2,000 French nationals having traveled to the conflict zone as of May 2016. The country also suffers from a major radicalization problem within its prisons, where an estimated 1,400 inmates are believed to be radicalized.<sup>15</sup>

An exception to this sobering assessment is Italy which has thus far not experienced major jihadist terrorism attacks. One analyst finds Italy's exceptionalism particularly noteworthy since the majority of undocumented arrivals in Europe land on the country's shores. This statistic weakens the argument made by some that illegal immigration correlates to a higher probability of terror attacks in the short-term.<sup>16</sup>

Italian scholars Stefano Bonino and Andrea Beccaro suggest several reasons for Italian counterterrorism success. These include:<sup>17</sup>

- (1) The aggressive use of deportation of those suspected of being involved in terrorism. From 2015 to the end of 2019, Italy expelled and returned over 400 people to their country of origin. Moreover, compared with the rest of Europe, Italian judges have more freedom to

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<sup>14</sup> Francesco Marone, "Tackling the Foreign Fighter Threat in Europe," *Istituto Per GLI Studi Di Politica Internazionale*, January 9, 2020.

<sup>15</sup> Colin P. Clarke, "As Right-Wing Extremism Rises, Jihadism Still Persists," *World Politics Review*, February 19, 2021.

<sup>16</sup> Carlotta Seriola, "Jihadist Terrorism: Italy the Next Target?" *Global Risk Institute*, January 20, 2021.

<sup>17</sup> Stefano Bonino and Andrea Beccaro, "Why has Italy avoided jihadist terrorist attacks? Our research helps explain," *The Washington Post*, Dec. 24, 2019.

issue warrants authorizing the electronic surveillance of suspects' conversations through wiretaps.

- (2) Italy has established highly centralized collaboration. Its Anti-terrorism Strategic Analysis Committee (CASA) was established within the Ministry of Interior in late 2003 and operates as a common platform where Italian security forces share information about terrorist groups, intelligence, people, and threats.
- (3) Italian security services have decades of counterterrorism experience acquired during the *Anni di piombo* (“Years of Lead”) — a period of social and political turmoil marked by a wave of both left-wing and right-wing terrorist attacks from the late 1960s through the 1980s. Carlotta Seriola, an analyst at the Global Risk Institute agrees, noting that “the presence of formidably organized criminal groups has had one upside: it has provided Italian authorities with an abundance of experience and know-how in tracking and infiltrating tight-knit, underground criminal groups.”<sup>18</sup>

Italy's exceptionalism in terms of jihadist terrorism is certainly one bright spot in Europe's terrorism landscape. But there is a saying in the world of investing that applies equally for terrorism — “past performance is no guarantee of future results.”

### *Domestic Terrorists*

Another concerning threat is the rise of domestic extremism across the globe. In the United States, the FBI defines “domestic terrorism” as acts “Perpetrated by individuals and/or groups inspired by or associated with primarily U.S.-based movements that espouse extremist ideologies of a political, religious, social, racial, or environmental nature.”<sup>19</sup>

Recent violent extremist attacks have demonstrated that multiple drivers and ideologies can combine to compel individuals to action — a mix which FBI Director Christopher Wray describes as a “salad bar” of ideologies. These include racially and ethnically motivated violent extremists; animal rights/ environmental violent extremists; abortion-related extremists (in support of pro-life or pro-choice beliefs); anti-government/anti-authority violent extremists.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Seriola, January 20, 2021

<sup>19</sup> FBI, [www.fbi.gov/investigate/terrorism](https://www.fbi.gov/investigate/terrorism).

<sup>20</sup> The Soufan Center *IntelBrief*, “The Counterterrorism Challenge of ‘Salad Bar’ Ideologies,” March 29, 2021.

In March 2021, the U.S. Director of National Intelligence assessed that “domestic violent extremists (DVE) who are motivated by a range of ideologies and galvanized by recent political and societal events in the United States pose an elevated threat to the Homeland in 2021.” The assessment goes on to state that “racially or ethnically motivated violent extremists who promote the superiority of the white race are the DVE actors with the most persistent and concerning transnational connections because individuals with similar ideological beliefs exist outside the United States and [they] frequently communicate with and seek to influence each other.”<sup>21</sup>

Two notable incidents in 2020 illustrate the threat. In October, the FBI disrupted an anti-government extremist plot to kidnap Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer. Two of the arrested plotters were founding members of the Wolverine Watchmen, an anti-government, anti-law enforcement militia group. In May, a U.S. Air Force sergeant linked to the “boogaloo” movement was charged with murder and attempted murder in the shooting death of a federal security officer outside a courthouse in Oakland, California. Members of boogaloo espouse an extremist ideology that seeks to bring about a second civil war to overthrow the government.

In the United States, attacks by domestic extremists are often prosecuted under Federal “hate crime” statutes. The FBI defines a hate crime as a “criminal offense against a person or property, motivated in whole or in part by an offender’s bias against a race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender or gender identity.”<sup>22</sup> Many such attacks target religious institutions such as synagogues, mosques, or churches frequented by African-Americans. Notable examples include:

- On 17 June 2015, Dylann Roof, a white supremacist, committed a mass shooting at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina. Nine African-Americans were killed in the attack. Roof was eventually convicted of 33 Federal hate crime and murder charges and sentenced to death.
- On 27 October 2018, Robert Gregory Bowers, an extremist who posted anti-Semitic comments online, committed a mass shooting at the “Tree of Life” synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Bowers killed eleven people and wounded six, the deadliest attack on the Jewish community in the United States. Bowers has been charged with 29 Federal hate crimes.

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<sup>21</sup> U.S. Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *Domestic Violent Extremism Poses Heightened Threat in 2021*, March 1, 2021.

<sup>22</sup> Adeel Hassan, “Hate-Crime Violence its 16-Year High, FBI Reports,” *The New York Times*, November 12, 2019.

These incidents also demonstrate the seriousness of the threat posed by so-called “lone wolves.”<sup>23</sup> In testimony before the U.S. Congress, FBI Director Wray stated, “The greatest threat we face in the homeland is that posed by lone actors radicalized online who look to attack soft targets with easily accessible weapons.”<sup>24</sup>

It is noteworthy in this context to mention that intelligence, which acts as an “early warning” of attacks, is much more effective in infiltrating and thwarting threats from organized terrorists. It is harder to detect and thwart those acting alone who often operate without support or network. FBI Director Wray:

A lot of times [domestic terrorists] are communicating with each other in a more informal way online or in some other way inspiring each other...It’s more diffuse and unstructured and undisciplined.” That lack of structure, Wray goes on to say, “makes it more challenging, for example, to get human sources or undercover inserted. If there’s no organization to insert somebody into, that’s a challenge, so that’s part of the different nature of the threat.”<sup>25</sup>

The difficulty of detecting lone terrorists via intelligence also puts a greater burden on an organization’s overall security posture to act in a preventative capacity.

Right-wing extremist violence is also on the rise in other western countries. Ken McCallum, the head of Great Britain’s domestic counterintelligence and security agency, MI5, has warned that

... violent right-wing extremism is now a major threat facing the country, with more than a quarter of serious terrorist attacks stopped in the final stages linked to neo-fascist and racist groups... That threat was now only second only to Islamist terrorism, and the trend was likely to continue, he said.

The danger is likely to continue in the near future, he warned, with worrying numbers of young people attracted to the ideology and increasing evidence of international links between the groups including with those in the U.S....<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> “Lone Wolf” terrorists are those who prepare and commit violent acts – usually alone – outside any command structure and without material assistance from any group.

<sup>24</sup> Christopher Wray, Director of the FBI; “Statement Before the House Homeland Security Committee: Worldwide Threats to the Homeland,” September 17, 2020.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Kim Sengupta, “Violent right-wing extremism is a ‘major threat’ in the UK, MI5 boss says,” *The Independent*, October 15, 2020.

The government of French President Emmanuel Macron has also been increasingly concerned about the growing threat of the far right and populism in France. On the same day as the jihadist-inspired stabbing attack at the Notre Dame Basilica in Nice, police in Avignon shot and killed an armed man who was waving a gun and reportedly wearing a “Defend Europe” jacket from the far-right group, “Generation Identity.”

A driving ideology of the far right in France is the philosophy of “identitarianism,” which is the idea of the nationalist celebration of an ethnic identity—typically white European—and the belief that identity is under threat. In France, the identitarian movement is spearheaded by two groups, *Les Identitaires* and Generational Identity.

“Generation Identity” is a pan-European youth movement that originated in France in 2012 and has since spread to at least five other regions in Europe. Adherents believe that white Europeans are falling victim to “the Great Replacement”—the process by which the indigenous European population is replaced by non-European migrants.

In February 2021, the French government announced the dissolution of Generation Identity for promoting “openly hateful rhetoric,” which “contributes to heightening tensions within the national community” and “provokes violent attacks.” The ban took effect on March 3, 2021.<sup>27</sup>

After a gunman killed ten people in the city of Hanau in February 2020, German Interior Minister Horst Seehofer declared that far-right extremism was “the biggest threat” facing Germany.<sup>28</sup> In July 2020, during their presentation of the 2019 report by Germany’s domestic intelligence agency, *Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz* or *BfV* (Office for the Protection of the Constitution), Seehofer and BfV chief Thomas Haldenwang noted that right-wing extremism in Germany sharply increased the previous year. The BfV report identified 32,080 right-wing extremists in Germany in 2019, up from 24,100 the year before. “Right-wing extremism, racism, and anti-Semitism continue to increase in Germany,” Seehofer said.<sup>29</sup>

### *The Angry, the Alienated, and the Crazy*

The two mass shootings in March 2021 in Georgia and Colorado remind us that acts of violence by individuals may be motivated by little more than anger, alienation, or mental illness.

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<sup>27</sup> Counterextremism Project, *France: Extremism & Counter-Extremism*, downloaded on March 30, 2021.

<sup>28</sup> Tony Barber, “Germany wakes up to the far-right terror threat,” *Financial Times*, December 3, 2020.

<sup>29</sup> Deutsche Welle, “Number of right-wing extremists in Germany on rise, security report suggests,” July 9, 2020.

Anger associated with a custody dispute was the principal motivation behind Scott Evans Dekraai's October 12, 2011 shooting at a Seal Beach, California hair salon where his ex-wife worked. The attack left nine dead.

On November 5, 2017, Devin Patrick Kelley fatally shot 26 people and wounded 20 others during a shooting spree at the First Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs, Texas. It was the worst mass shooting in the state's history, fifth worst in U.S. history. Kelley had a history of violence. While serving in the U.S. Air Force, he was court-martialed for assaulting his spouse and child. Later, he was convicted of animal cruelty. Two ex-girlfriends told NBC News that Kelley stalked them after breakups. One of whom added, "He was very sick in the head. He would tell me very sick strange things."<sup>30</sup>

In Toronto, in February of last year, a Canadian teenager stabbed three people with a machete, killing one and injuring two others. The assailant was charged with "first degree murder with terrorist activity and attempted murder with terrorist activity." The attacker in that case was determined to be a so-called "Incel," or member of a highly misogynist subculture known as "involuntary celibates," who are unable to find romantic or sexual partners. Many of those who identify as Incels participate in a toxic online culture which encourages violence against women.

According to *The New York Times*, at least six mass murders, resulting in a total of 44 deaths, have been committed since 2014 by men who have either self-identified as Incels or who had mentioned Incel-related names and writings in their private writings or Internet postings.<sup>31</sup> These include:

- 23 May 2014. Elliot Rodger killed six and injured 14 others near the campus of the University of California, Santa Barbara in Isla Vista before killing himself.
- 1 October 2015. Chris Harper-Mercer killed nine people and injured eight others before killing himself in a shooting at the Umpqua Community College campus in Roseburg, Oregon. He left a manifesto at the scene, outlining his interest in other mass murders including the Isla Vista killings, his anger at not having a girlfriend, and his animus towards the world.

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<sup>30</sup> Tim Stelloh, Caitlin Fichtel, and Tracy Connor, "Who Is Devin Kelley, the Texas Church Shooter?" *NBC News*, Nov 6, 2017.

<sup>31</sup> Amanda Taub, "On Social Media's Fringes, Growing Extremism Targets Women," *The New York Times*, May 9, 2018.

- 7 December 2017. William Atchison killed two people before killing himself in a shooting at a high school, in Aztec, New Mexico where he had previously been a student. He had used the pseudonym "Elliot Rodger" on several online forums and praised "the supreme gentleman" (a term Rodger had used to describe himself, which has since become a common reference among Incel communities).
- 23 April 2018. Alek Minassian was charged with ten counts of first-degree murder after he conducted a deadly vehicle ramming attack in Toronto. Shortly before the attack, Minassian had allegedly posted on Facebook that "the Incel Rebellion has already begun" and applauded Elliot Rodger,

Self-identified Incels are predominantly white, male, and heterosexual. The ideology is characterized by resentment, self-pity, racism, misogyny, misanthropy, and narcissism. Discussions often revolve around the belief that men are entitled to sex; other common topics include loneliness, unhappiness, suicide, sexual surrogates, and prostitutes. Opposition to feminism and women's rights is commonplace.

The Southern Poverty Law Center describes the Incel subculture as "part of the online male supremacist ecosystem," and in 2018 added them to their list of hate groups. The Incel ideology, which has led some to commit violent acts -- has been described by governments and researchers as a terrorism threat. They have largely been flying under the world's radar -- another group of alienated extremists fulminating in the dark reaches of the Internet. But they are a threat to be reckoned with.

The mentally ill can also pose a risk of violence. On July 20, 2012, James Eagen Holmes, who was suffering from serious mental illness, killed 12 and wounded 58 in an attack in a cinema in Aurora, Colorado.

On the night of August 4, 2019, Connor Betts shot and killed nine in Dayton, Ohio in a crowded nightclub district. Bett's former girlfriend recalls that Betts complained that "he was unable to sleep because of dark, animal-like shadows that tormented him at night." He also "talked a lot about the "dark, evil things" he heard in his head."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Emily Davies, Tim Craig, and Hannah Natanson, "Ex-Girlfriend Says Dayton Shooter Heard Voices, Talked About 'Dark, Evil Things,'" *The Washington Post*, August 5, 2019.

Andreas Lubitz was a pilot for the airline, Germanwings. He had been previously treated for suicidal tendencies and declared “unfit to work” by his doctor. But he failed to disclose this medical diagnosis to his employer. On March 24, 2015, he was the co-pilot on Germanwings Flight 9525, an Airbus A320-211 flying from Barcelona, Spain to Düsseldorf, Germany. Lubitz waited until the captain left the cockpit, then locked the cockpit door and initiated a controlled descent that crashed the aircraft into a mountainside in the French Alps. All 144 passengers and six crew members were killed. This terrible crime should also be categorized as an “insider” attack, as well as mass murder by someone suffering mental illness.

Another dramatic mass murder was committed by Stephen Paddock on the night of October 1, 2017. Paddock opened fire from a suite in the Mandalay Bay Hotel on concertgoers at the Route 91 Harvest Festival in Las Vegas killing 52 and wounding over 400. It was the worst mass shooting in American history.

Since many mass shooters commit suicide or are shot and killed by police, we can never be sure of the motivation behind their murder sprees. This was the case with Connor Betts and Stephen Paddock. Regardless of the motivation, preventing attacks from individuals whose behavior is unpredictable and often irrational is a significant security challenge, especially when such individuals often retain the ability to plan and conduct deadly plots.

The mentally ill, or more precisely the untreated mentally ill, could pose an external threat to “soft targets” – facilities and events that are undefended or lightly defended, or large public spaces where someone can easily blend in with the crowd.

## **ADVERSARY METHODS OF OPERATION**

This article has extensively discussed mass shootings and stabbings as methods of operation (MO) by various threat actors. Most attacks occur at large, open venues accessible to the public.

These are “soft targets” which are vulnerable to active shooters or others intent on committing a violent attack. Three other attack methodologies deserve mention:

### *Improvised Explosive Devices (IED)*

In the past decade, we have witnessed several devastating explosives attacks:

- 18 July 2012. An explosive device detonated on a hotel shuttle bus at Burgas Airport (BOJ) in Bulgaria. The bus was preparing to transport 42 Israeli tourists, mostly youths, from the

airport to their hotel after their flight from Tel Aviv. The explosion killed the Bulgarian bus driver and five Israelis. Thirty-two more were injured. Hezbollah operatives were implicated in the attack.

- 13 April 2013. Two homemade pressure cooker bombs exploded 12 seconds apart near the finish line of the Boston Marathon. The devices were planted by two brothers of Chechen-Dagestani descent, Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev. Three people were killed in the attack and 264 injured among whom were 16 who lost limbs.
- 22 March 2016. Two bombs exploded at the Brussels National Airport (BRU) in Zaventem, Belgium killing eleven. At nearly the same time, another device exploded at the Maalbeek Metro Station in central Brussels killing 20 more. Another bomb was found and rendered safe during a search of the airport. The perpetrators belonged to the same Islamic State terrorist cell that had been responsible for the November 2015 attacks in Paris.
- 28 June 2016. Suicide bombings and a mass shooting occurred in Terminal 2 of the Atatürk International Airport (IST) in Istanbul, Turkey. Forty-five were killed (as well as the three attackers). Over 230 were wounded. The attackers were identified as Russian, Uzbek, and Kyrgyz and believed to have undertaken the attack on behalf of the Islamic State.

Explosives attacks – even against soft targets – require a higher level of sophistication than do attacks using firearms. Unlike firearms, explosives are highly controlled within the United States. It is, however, possible for someone to make their own explosives and assemble a device. There are even instructions on the Internet on how to do so.

There are two MO's for attacks using IED's. In one, the perpetrator can discreetly plant the bomb and leave the area. The bomb could be equipped with a timer establishing a time to explode, or the device could be set-off remotely. In the second scenario, the suicide bomber would approach the target and then detonate the device. Suicide bombers are very difficult to detect and neutralize even for alert and well-trained police or security officers.

#### *Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Devices (VBIED)*

Also known as a car or truck bomb, a VBIED is a large explosive device planted in a vehicle which is then driven to a location in proximity of the target. The explosive device can then be detonated remotely or by a suicide driver. At a public venue, such as a building in a city or at an

airport, the adversary could drive up along the curb and then exit the vehicle. Even if there were police or security officers monitoring the curb for unattended vehicles, there would be little time to recognize the threat and summon assistance.

VBIED attacks are rare outside war zones and regions of active insurgent conflict. The following three VBIED attacks were devastating. What is notable is that the perpetrators were completely different types of adversaries. One attack was committed by a terrorist cell motivated by foreign (jihadist) ideology, the second was committed by a pair of “lone wolves” inspired by domestic extremist ideology, and the third by a terrorist cell that was part of a regional separatist organization.

- World Trade Center, New York City – 26 February 1993. A terrorist cell led by Ramzi Yousef and financed by Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, planted a 1,336 lb. urea nitrate-hydrogen gas bomb in a Ryder van and detonated it under the North Tower of the World Trade Center in New York City. The attack killed six and injured over 1,400 others.
- Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma – 19 April 1995. Timothy McVeigh, with the assistance of Terry Nichols, constructed a bomb consisting of fertilizer, ammonium nitrate, and diesel oil in a Ryder box truck which McVeigh parked in front of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. He detonated the bomb whose blast killed 168 and injured 680 others in what was then the deadliest act of terrorism in American history until the 9/11 attacks.
- Parking Garage, Madrid-Barajas Airport, Spain – 30 December 2006. A bomb containing 1,800 lbs. of explosives placed in a van exploded in the parking garage near Terminal 4 of the Madrid-Barajas Airport. Two people were killed and over 30 were injured. In addition to causing the casualties, it led to the partial collapse of the five-story parking garage. The Basque separatist group ETA claimed responsibility for the attack.

Autonomous vehicle technology, which will eventually make “driverless” cars widely available, pose an additional threat in the future. An autonomous vehicle containing an explosive device could be directed to pull alongside a target building or transportation node at which point the device could be remotely detonated.

In 2019, a man from Sheffield in the United Kingdom was sentenced to 15 years in prison for testing improvised explosive devices that could be installed in a remotely-controlled vehicle.

Farhad Salah, a supporter of the Islamic State, posted a message to a contact on Facebook: “My only intent is to find a way to carry out a martyrdom operation with cars without driver...” Jurors found Salah guilty of preparing to commit acts of terrorism.<sup>33</sup>

### *Vehicle Ramming Attacks*

In recent years, vehicle ramming attacks have emerged as a lethal terrorist MO. In July 2016, a devastating truck attack in Nice, France killed 84 during a rampage along the *Promenade des Anglais* crowded with people celebrating Bastille Day. Later that year, a man hijacked a truck and then plowed into a popular Christmas Market near Berlin’s Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church killing 12 and injuring dozens of others.

2017 was a particularly deadly year for vehicle ramming attacks:

- On January 8<sup>th</sup>, A truck driven by an Arab citizen of Israel plowed into a group of uniformed Israel Defense Forces soldiers disembarking from a bus on the Armon Hanatziv Esplanade in East Jerusalem killing four and injuring 15.
- On April 7<sup>th</sup>, a truck was hijacked and driven into crowds along the Drottninggatan (Queen Street) in central Stockholm before crashing into the Åhléns department store. This Islamist terrorist attack took the lives of five and seriously injured 14 others.
- On June 19<sup>th</sup>, a van was driven into pedestrians in Finsbury Park, London near the Finsbury Park Mosque killing one and injuring at least nine others. The van was driven by Darren Osborne, who authorities said was motivated by anti-Muslim hatred and had recently radicalized.
- On August 12<sup>th</sup>, a man rammed into a crowd of people counter-protesting a white nationalist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia. One person died and several were injured.
- On August 17<sup>th</sup>, a young Moroccan drove a Fiat Talento van onto the pavement of the La Rambla pedestrian mall in Barcelona zig-zagging at high speed ramming pedestrians and cyclists. ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack which killed 13 and injured 130 others.
- On October 31<sup>st</sup>, an Uzbek immigrant named Sayfullo Saipov, drove a rented pickup truck down a bike path in Manhattan along the Hudson River in New York City striking pedestrians and cyclists before colliding with a school bus. Eight people were killed and at least 12 were

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<sup>33</sup> BBC News, “Farhad Salah Jailed Over Driverless Car Plot,” July 24, 2019.

injured.

The following year, on April 23<sup>rd</sup>, Alek Minassian, a self-identified “Incel” (involuntary celibate), conducted a vehicle ramming attack along Yonge Street in Toronto killing 10 and injuring 16.

In a joint bulletin to law enforcement, Federal authorities in the United States, warn that vehicle ramming attacks “could be used to target locations where large numbers of people congregate, including sporting events, entertainment venues, or shopping centers. Vehicle ramming offers terrorists with limited access to explosives or weapons an opportunity to conduct a Homeland attack with minimal prior training or experience.”<sup>34</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The motivation of perpetrators of a mass murder events is of interest to law enforcement officials, intelligence analysts, the news media, scholars, and of course, the general public.

“Motive gives us the illusion of making sense out of incomprehensible acts,” commentator Kate Cohen observes trenchantly. “And it implies – by locating a cause before the tragic effect – that we can keep it from happening again. If we figure out what issues lie beneath an eruption of violence, if we point them out while everyone is paying attention, we might be able to do something about them....Sorting through the pathologies of each particular killer might teach us something about our country,; it might even do some good. *What it won't do is prevent the next killing spree.*”<sup>35</sup>

How do leaders of organizations prevent the next killing spree?

First, leaders must understand that they have important responsibilities for the safety and security of their people, assets, and operations. They cannot delegate these responsibilities to others. As has been demonstrated in this article, in spite of their best efforts, it is impossible for public safety officials and law enforcement officers to prevent all mass murder attacks.

Second, leaders must assume threats do exist. An attack could happen at any time, anywhere – during general rampages (Oslo – 2011, Nova Scotia – 2020); at airports (Brussels and Istanbul

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<sup>34</sup> “DHS-FBI Warning: Terrorist Use of Vehicle Ramming Tactics,” February 12, 2012.

<sup>35</sup> Kate Cohen, “We can focus on motive, but real change won't come unless we focus on the means,” *The Washington Post*, March 26, 2021.

– 2016); on subways (London – 2005, Brussels – 2016, Utrecht – 2019); on trains (Madrid – 2004, Würzburg – 2016); along public streets (Barcelona – 2017, Stockholm – 2017, Toronto – 2018); at concert venues (Bataclan in Paris – 2015, Manchester – 2017, Las Vegas – 2017); at restaurants and nightclubs (Paris – 2015, Orlando – 2016, London – 2017, Hanau – 2020); where people gather to celebrate (Nice – 2016, Berlin – 2016), and where people gather to pray (Charleston – 2015, Sutherland Springs – 2017, Pittsburgh – 2018, Christchurch – 2019).

Third, leaders must work proactively to prevent attacks that endanger an organization's people, assets, and operations. The overall security risk to an organization is a function of the threats in the environment (adversaries and their capabilities), the vulnerability of the protected environment (the likelihood of an adversary successfully executing a particular method of operation considering existing security measures), and the consequences of security breaches (the costs of a successful adversarial attack). Since not all violent attacks can be prevented, minimizing the consequences of them is also an important objective.

Leaders should employ risk-based decision making to develop a comprehensive security program. Risk-based decision making is a systematic and analytic process to consider the likelihood of security breaches, to identify measures to reduce vulnerability, and mitigate the consequences of security breaches that might occur.



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