

## Book Review

### *Understanding Lone Wolf Terrorism: Global Patterns, Motivations and Prevention*

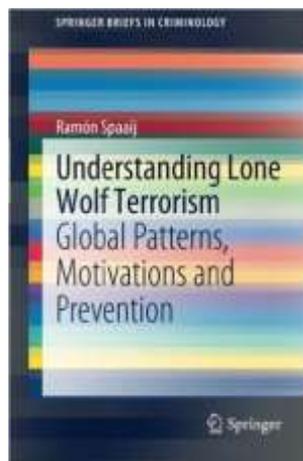
by Dr Ramón Spaaij

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We are all familiar with acts of terrorism that are carried out by either structured or leaderless organisations. These date back to the early-1960s, and before; but when examining so-called *lone-wolf* terrorism, we also see that these acts are by no means a new phenomenon.

With a primary focus on terrorist organisations—particularly post-September 11—it is arguable that lone-wolf terrorism has not received the attention it deserves. This lack of research has, on many occasions, left law enforcement and intelligence agencies (LEIA) in a somewhat ominous position to properly identify, manage and hinder individuals who plan and conduct terrorist acts in self-imposed seclusion and impunity.

Spaaij's publication develops a clear working definition for lone-wolf terrorism, and provides a discussion of the distinction between what he claims lone-wolf terrorists are, and what they are not. He outlines the evolution of lone-wolf terrorism, including its effectiveness and incidence rates, and provides an examination of the motivational patterns and ideologies used by lone-wolf terrorists, including the sociological and psychological conditions that influence and radicalise individuals to engage in violence. By using specific case studies in juxtaposition with real-world examples, Spaaij analyses the evidence from six fundamental influencing areas, including: the individual themselves; familial and interpersonal relationships; group and social associations; state and government actions/reactions; as well as historical and contemporary lone-wolf terrorists.

Using this case study approach, Spaaij clarifies what he considers the misperceptions about lone-wolf terrorism are by asserting that terrorists can only be classified as lone-wolves if they operate in complete isolation, and follow their own ideological motivations to violence. He explains that violent individuals—or as he describes them, *lone nuts*—who do not have any ideological reasoning, cannot be considered lone-wolves. Spaaij also suggests that what academics have coined *lone-wolf packs*, which consist of two or more individuals who are ideologically motivated, but may, or may not take direction from larger terrorist organisations, cannot be considered lone-wolves.

The five case studies Spaaij uses were obtained from the *Transnational Terrorism, Security and the Rule of Law* (TTSRL) 2006–2009 database, the *Global Terrorism Database* (GTD), and the RAND-MIPT *Terrorism Knowledge Base* (TKB). The case studies include the lone-wolf terrorist attacks carried out by Theodore Kaczynski, Franz Fuchs, Yigal Amir, David Copeland, and Volkert van der Graaf. These were selected to demonstrate that there is no single profile for a lone-wolf terrorist and that there is no single strategy used to carry out lone-wolf attacks. Spaaij draws on a number of other examples of terrorist attacks to demonstrate the differences between lone-wolf terrorists and those who are part of autonomous (albeit small) groups—citing the Oklahoma City bombing (1995), the Madrid bombings (2004), and the London bombings (2005), to reinforce this point.

It is important to note that the conclusions Spaaij draws from the TTSRL, GTD, and TKD indicate a sharp rise in lone-wolf terrorist attacks in fifteen countries, over a 42-year period (1968–2010, as is illustrated in the appendix), demonstrating the substantial growth of lone-wolf terrorism over time. One of the major gaps in the databases, however, is that they do not provide details of the perpetrators ideologies. These data sources also fail to separate between lone-wolf terrorism and terrorism committed by small isolated groups.

The analysis in the publication does, however, convey that singular profiling of a lone-wolf terrorist is problematic, as lone-wolves have no singular personality type; the individual profile of each lone wolf is particularly unique to their personal grievance/s; and because the lone wolf tends to be very meticulous in the covert planning and carrying-out of terrorist attacks. While Spaaij's book discusses a number of issues that are central to profiling lone-wolf terrorists, he also provides recommendations to agencies on how they might respond to their violent acts. In doing so he outlines legalistic, repressive, and conciliatory

responses. These include the development of strategies to address terrorism within domestic legal frameworks; the enhancement of security, intelligence and law-enforcement's capability to inhibit potential terrorists; and, the potential meeting of terrorists' short-term demands to preserve life, but reduce their longer-term goals of influencing through media and propaganda.

The definition of a lone-wolf terrorist put forward by Dr Spaaij demonstrates how solitary individuals carry-out and justify their use of violence based on ideology; and how their tactical methodology, planning and implementation of activities are conceived without any direct command or control. Although terrorist attacks carried-out by organisations still outnumber those conducted by lone-wolves, by providing an in-depth examination and analysis of this form of terrorism, Spaaij affords a tangible platform for LEIA, academia and the community at large to identify, manage and more importantly, address this rising crime-type.

#### ABOUT THE REVIEWER

**Jason-Leigh Striegher**, MA, is a doctoral candidate at the Australian Graduate School of Policing and Security, Charles Sturt University, Sydney where his research focus is on the prevention of home-grown violent extremism. Prior to commencing his doctoral studies, Jason-Leigh completed a Master of Arts in Terrorism, Safety and Security. With over 27 years of experience in the Australian Defence Force and various policing agencies, Mr Striegher's roles have included, Anti-Terrorism Instructor for the Iraqi Police Service in Jordan; Operational Safety Assessor in East Timor and Bougainville; Senior Military Police Investigator in Malaysia; Force Military Police Liaison Officer in Cyprus—which included involvement in the major evacuation of Australians from Lebanon in 2006; and a number of years as an investigator within a Joint Counter-Terrorism Team.

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