

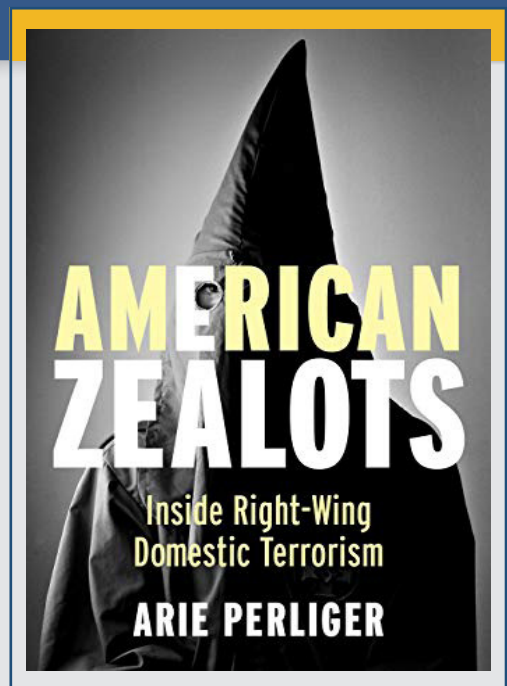
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BOOK REVIEW



AMERICAN ZEALOTS

INSIDE RIGHT-WING DOMESTIC TERRORISM

ARIE PERLIGER



Book Review

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Director General

Major General Mohammed bin Saeed Al-Moghedi

Secretary-General of the Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition/Acting

Editor-in-Chief

Ashour Ibrahim Aljuhani

Director of Research and Studies Center

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TAOQ RESEARCH



E-mail: info@taoqresearch.org

Phone: +966 114890124

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Book Review

AMERICAN ZEALOTS INSIDE RIGHT-WING DOMESTIC TERRORISM

This book aims to illustrate, analyze, and explain the recent developments in American far-right violence while also providing a broad historical and geographical context. The dynamic nature of the far right in the United States and its multitude of ideological and operational facets can be perplexing to many students of this ideological sphere. Like many other social and political movements, the American far right is influenced by and cooperates with foreign actors. Close relationships have evolved between American neo-Nazi and skinhead groups and similar groups in European and other Anglo-Saxon countries (such as Australia and Canada), and some U.S. white supremacy groups also provide active support to foreign nationalist militias (for example, far-right activists from U.S organizations such as the Atomwaffen Division and Rise Above Movement joined ultranationalist militias operating in eastern Ukraine).

Comprehensive review

The book deals with the historical origins of the different streams of the violent American far-right, as well as their unique ideological and operational characteristics. The author explains the main concepts and theories used to describe and explain far-right politics and violence and how they are beneficial for studying the American case. He also explains the main ideological pillars of the American far right and their intellectual origins, the history of the various ideological streams of the American far right and how their organizational and operational facets evolved over time.

The book consists of eight main chapters: The first one is The Challenges of Comprehending and Responding to Domestic Terrorism; the second one is An Ideological Typology of the Violent Far Right; the third one is Historical Pillars of the Violent American Far Right; the fourth one is Tactics of the American Far Right; the fifth one is the Rise and Decline of Far-Right Violence in the United States; the sixth one is Perpetrators of Far-Right Violence; the seventh one is Contemporary Discourse of the American Far Right; and the eighth one is The Future of the Violent American Far Right.

The author conducts an empirical examination of contemporary violence of the American far-right, shedding light on social, economic and political activists, and their impact on the American social policy. Then, he analyzes the various means and types of violence used by these groups, studying the relationship between their extremist acts and their ideology. He also explains the dominant trends that affect the far right, the impact of geographical, demographic and psychological characteristics on the perpetrators of far right violence, and the fundamental difference between “spontaneous” and “calculated” perpetrators.

Finally, he turns to the contemporary discourse of the American far-right, providing primary sources to examine the goals, propaganda, and ideological upcoming plans of the far right groups. He also deals with the circumstances of the American far right:

Its emergence and prosperity in certain regions and societies, and at different historical periods. This confirms the importance of the historical and geographical contexts in understanding the evolution of the American far right.

The author believes in the necessity of comprehending the historical and geographical trends that affect the American far right in order to identify its movements well. For example, the Christian Identity movement, which is one of the popular streams within the American far right, is a descendant of an ideological movement that emerged in the nineteenth-century from Britain. Similarly, the American skinhead subculture was initially “imported” from Europe and in turn was “exported” to other Anglo-Saxon countries.

Far-Right Violence vs American Ethos

Understanding the factors that lead to a rise in support for far-right ideology and violence is crucial for ensuring that American society maintains its liberal, democratic, and inclusive ethos and can address groups that aim to undermine those virtues.

According to the author, far-right terrorism also represents a substantial threat in terms of its ability to shape political discourse and related civilian norms. The author confirms that the far right terrorism has always been part of the American political scene, so it is important to understand the factors that support its beliefs, ideas and its orientation towards violence to preserve liberal and democratic values in society.

He believes that the far-right terrorism doesn't only lead to losses and damage of property, which creates suspicion regarding the legitimacy or usefulness of existing political values, norms and practices. According to the author, the domestic terrorism affected by the domestic policies is far more dangerous than the external one because it garners popular support for militant actions that facilitate recruitment.

In this context, it is important to emphasize the relatively positive connotation that violent civilian



resistance has in the American popular (historical) mindset, as such groups were crucial in the struggle for American independence, as well as in some of the subsequent conflicts in which the United States was involved. Thus, violently confronting and challenging a central rule is not automatically perceived as illegitimate, as it is in many other democracies. This certainly leads to a polarization of different groups their conviction of the far-right discourse.

The threat from domestic terrorism is also more acute as a result of the increasing political polarization within American society since the late 1990s. This polarization intensifies some core factors that are responsible for the rise in far-right violence. The growing popularity of the view that competition in the American political system is a zero-sum game, with limited space for political compromise, leads to extreme interpretations of the political reality, which in turn can inspire violent political activism. Moreover, since this polarization emphasizes the need to maximize any political victory or to avoid by all means political defeat, extremists will be inclined to use violence to further push their preferred policies or to take advantage of what they perceive as a tolerant political environment.

Far-Right Ideology

Researchers of the politics and activities of the far right face many challenges. Some of which are related to traditional social and political factors,

and others are related to the activities of the far right itself. In this regard, experts use several terms to talk about the right, such as: "the far right," "the right wing," "right-wing populism," and "the racist right."

The author prefers to use the terms "far right" and "right wing". He defines "far right" as groups and individuals whose ideology is located at the extremities of the ideological spectrum and who seek substantial changes in the sociopolitical order, while the right-wing is defined as parties and movements placed to the right of the center of the ideological spectrum.

A related controversy is associated with the similarities and gaps between far-right ideology and fascism. The dispute reflects both the tremendous influence that the rise of fascism in the early twentieth century and its consequences still exerts on the study of extreme political ideologies and a larger debate about what the core components of far-right ideology and practices are. It is difficult to differentiate between the two.

Xenophobia, racism, and exclusionism are the most prominent practices that fall under the far right. Xenophobia involves behaviors and sentiments derived from fear, hate, and hostility toward groups perceived as alien or distinct. As for Racism, it operates in the social level like xenophobia but on racial grounds, and the belief in the national and moral significance of natural and hereditary differences across races and the



conviction that the white race is superior to others. Such people feel annoyed when seeing someone not white in a social rank.

Understanding the phenomenon of the extreme right requires the recognition of the existence of many definitions and divergences of views and perspectives. Because the new definitions are manifestations of societal changes over the course of generations. Although some elements of other ideological beliefs are sometimes constructed in a different theoretical or methodological framework, in most cases these elements still represent the intellectual underpinnings of far-right politics.

The far-right and white supremacy

The American far right was associated for many years with the militant activism of the Ku Klux Klan. While the KKK in its modern form is still active, since the mid-1960s other varieties of ideological groups have begun to populate the American far-right universe. Among these are militias, Christian Identity groups, skinheads, and neo-Nazis. From an analytical perspective, this evolution has had two major consequences. First, the American far right has become more vibrant and more ideologically and structurally diverse than ever before. Second, the boundaries of the American far right have

grown less distinct, with many of the new groups occasionally taking inspiration from ideas and practices originating from outside conventional far-right discourse.

An examination of the movements and organizations that are located at the right side of the American political spectrum identifies four major social movement industries that seem to meet the maximalist definition of far right and also manifest violent tendencies. These are the white supremacy, antigovernment, fundamentalist, and pro-life social movement industries. These all include organizations that utilize violent practices to promote or force nativist and extreme nationalist ideas. Naturally, many of them also include organizations that embrace various xenophobic, segregationist, racist, and antidemocratic inclinations.

Ideas of nationalism, homogeneity, racism, exclusion and xenophobia appeared clearly in the ideological discourse of the far right. The groups that are part of the white supremacy social movement industry are interested in preserving or restoring what they perceive as the natural racial or ethnic hierarchy by enforcing social and political superiority over minority groups such as African Americans, Jews, and immigrant communities.

The right also aims to reinforce the social policies, norms, and practices that seek to preserve the supremacy of the white race, and the privileges it enjoys. To achieve this, they use a language focusing on degrading other ethnic or religious groups to a protectionist language focusing on the need to protect the civil rights and heritage of the white people. The right uses its political and violent influence to empower whites, and to obstruct policies that would increase ethnic homogeneity in society.

In the early 1980s, the skinheads started to populate the white supremacy arena as well, infusing new cultural and social practices that absorbed traditional neo-Nazi elements and merged them with practices that emphasized antisocial and taboo-breaking behaviors inspired by a strong sense of economic and cultural marginalization. Via a strong focus on the development of white power music, intensive use of National Socialist sentiments, and violent attitudes toward ethnic and religious minorities and people with alternative lifestyles and political ideas (including communists and libertarians), the American manifestations of the skinheads aspired to represent the interests of the youth of the Aryan American working class.

Religious fundamentalism and anti-government

The author thinks that antigovernment sentiments have been present in American society since the

establishment of the Republic, and they involve diverse movements and ideological associations promoting antitaxation, gun rights, survivalist practices, and other ideas whose holders believe that they are liberal. In the early 1990s, militias or patriot movements emerged as a result of a combination of economic conditions and a response to cultural changes in American society such as the growing influence of minority groups and attempts to implement gun control, environmental legislation and legalization of abortion

The extremist religious groups use spurious religious heritage, symbols, rituals, and norms to popularize their beliefs and ideology and to legalize their racism. Academic studies refer here to ideologies that support literal interpretations of religious texts. This concept is used to describe extremist religious groups that practice coercive means to support their interpretations of religious texts and customs.

In contrast, the Christian Identity movement, which is an extension of the British Israelite religious movement that emerged in the United Kingdom in the nineteenth century, uses exclusively distinctive interpretations of religious texts to advocate ideas of nativism, exclusionism, and Aryan superiority. Aryans believe that they are the true chosen people, descendants of the Hebrew people, and not those who identify as Jews. Relatedly, identity narratives also assert that a racial war between the white



Anglo-Saxon nations and various non-Anglo-Saxon ethnic groups is imminent and that this conflict reflects the ongoing struggle between the forces of light and forces of evil as described in various religious texts.

The war will end with the restoration of the dominance of the Aryan people.

One of the ideological pillars of the far-right is the aspiration to restore values and practices that are part of the idealized historical heritage. Some far-right groups seek to use violence to undermine what they see as contrary to their traditions such as abortion, miscegenation and same-sex marriage.

When talking about the history of the American far-right, the author thinks that many who were concerned about the diminishing of Protestant dominance in America pointed a finger at the massive wave of immigrants, many from Catholic countries such as Italy and Ireland, which the country absorbed in the late 1840s and early 1950s. Between 1845 and 1854, nearly 3 million immigrants settled in the United States, more than one-eighth of the country's population at that time. The difficulties of assimilating this high number of newcomers in such a short time amplified concerns among many Americans about the country's ability to maintain the "American way of life," with its unique cultural, political, and economic characteristics.

Ku Klux Klan and American Nazism

Anti-immigrant sentiments were proliferating within American urban centers for two reasons. The first is the waves of new immigrants arriving in the United States in the hopes of escaping the horrors of World War I. These new immigrants were perceived as another strain on a struggling labor market. The second reason is the result of using the media to spread hostile propaganda messages.

The KKK also was able to enhance its presence in areas where it had had limited influence in the past, including the Northeast and Midwest, where dissatisfaction was expressed by returning African American soldiers at the continuation of their marginalization in American society, as well as massive migration of African Americans from the South to the North. KKK was perceived by many at that time as an "American Movement" focused on national issues, also convinced many northerners that the organization was legitimate that believed in American values.

While National Socialist groups have been part of the American political and social spheres since the early 1930s, unlike the KKK, they were never able to transform into a mass movement or gain access to the formal political system. Moreover, the fact that most Americans associated National Socialism with the German Nazi regime further prevented American Nazi groups from establishing significant





grassroots support. It is not a coincidence that in 2017 the largest neo-Nazi organization in the United States, the National Socialist Movement, decided to cease using the swastika in its formal publications and as one of its most important symbols.

Plans of Far-right violence

While arson attacks against religious facilities such as synagogues and mosques end in many cases without casualties, the psychological effect on the community can be substantial given the symbolic importance of the site and its communal function as a place of gathering and worship. Therefore, it is important to examine not just casualty numbers, but also other operational parameters. For example, many of the far right attacks (more than 40%) were committed against minorities, and this is very symbolic.

The terror of this ideology is also evident among antiabortionists who attack doctors, nurses, and abortion facilities. Upon examining the methods used by groups of extreme right, we can identify their tendencies through their operations, and the level of threat that each of them has reached. We can also extract many important insights from the data and announcements that they present to the public. While attacks on doctors gained much publicity, the vast majority of abortion violence was directed at property “abortion clinics and similar facilities”. Also, many of the attacks of racist groups (nearly a

third of all attacks) were of a subversive nature to cause material damage; however, members of the Christian Identity and armed groups are more likely to target people.

The Rise, Decline and Collapse

The author believes that the political competition in the United States during the elections leads to the involvement of political groups in more extremist activities, aiming to draw attention and express their political message. In order to explain the rise of violence in 2017, the author refers to two major schools of thought. The first is based on the assumption that policy makers and, by extension, government agencies are less inclined to apply severe sanctions to politically motivated crimes of groups that are ideologically close to them. The second school is based on the belief of the perpetrators that the new ruling elites are more tolerant of politically motivated violent and unlawful acts arising from their ideological camp. This is why political officials are more reluctant to fight the groups that support them.

The data demonstrates that there is a remarkable positive correlation between Republican control of Congress and the level of far-right violence. These two possibilities indicate that far-right activists see political dominance on the right as an opportunity to increase the potential benefits of violent activity while reducing potential costs. The author

confirms that these findings correspond with some aspects of theories grounded around the concepts of empowerment/political efficacy and Political Opportunity Structure.

The growing support of far-right ideology is a response to significant demographic and economic changes that result in a decline in the status and economic power of segments of the population that in the past used to be located at the upper middle of the socioeconomic strata. Moreover, such theories also tend to emphasize related normative and societal changes that can further facilitate sentiments of animosity and hostility toward minorities, immigrants and women.

Social and political changes provide a relative interpretation to the levels of far-right violence in America. Electoral results and related judicial and executive policies that seem to support conservative values and practices intensify rather than reduce the tendency to engage in illegal and violent political activism. These perceived opportunities empower ideological perpetrators because they believe they enjoy the legitimacy to express their radical far-right views. These findings reflect the great responsibility of decision makers, especially from the conservative side of the political spectrum, to help their political supporters develop a more balanced understanding of the meaning of politics and electoral results and how exactly they reflect the public, and that it should be accepted even if it leads to the success of the rivals.

Perpetrators of Far-Right Violence

Many experts believe that political violence is not a preserve of extremists; almost anyone can be convinced or pressured to join a violent group under specific conditions. The author contends that two major approaches for profiling perpetrators of political violence have evolved.

These two approaches focus on different types of characteristics to distinguish between the perpetrators and other people. The first is the sociological approach. It attempts to identify specific sociological characteristics of perpetrators of political violence, such as age, education, marital status, immigration status and income. No consensual sociological profile can fit all types of perpetrators, and it is possible, in specific cases, to identify a sociological profile of individuals who are affiliated with a specific ideological stream or fulfill a specific role within a militant organization. In addition, the efforts to develop the psychological profile of members of armed groups are directly

related to the motivating factors. In other words, it is directly related to identifying common characteristics among perpetrators of political violence, trying to identify the drivers behind their violent behavior.

The other approach attempts to identify the ideology and identity that permit individuals to take part in violent activities. This helps consolidate values and beliefs, and promotes the feeling of belonging to an ideological group. For example, according to this approach, the young Muslims who traveled to Syria and Iraq from Western countries in order to join ISIS are doing so because they feel stronger attachment and commitment to their Muslim religious identity and community than to their national identity (whether British, American, French, etc.)

Sociological Characteristics of Perpetrators of Far-Right Violence

The author refers to the available data of terrorist attacks that are complicated. It is believed that the majority of perpetrators are males. However, a thorough examination will uncover a more complicated reality. For example, in some jihadi terrorist groups, female members are engaged in specific missions, such as intelligence gathering, couriers, and medical assistance, but for ideological reasons are not allowed to participate in combat missions except in a few cases. However, it is clear that the equality-oriented ideology of left-wing groups influenced their composition in terms of gender. In Latin America and Europe, women made up a significant portion of the members (sometimes beyond 50 percent) and filled leadership roles. In contrast, most far-right groups are composed of and led by men. Until the early 1980s, for example, and in some chapters still today, women were not allowed to join the KKK. Similarly, most anecdotal evidence reflects that militia and neo-Nazi groups are composed mostly of male members. Therefore, it is not surprising that most perpetrators in the dataset were male (93.5 percent).

The author adds important findings regarding the data of the perpetrators. For example, compared to the perpetrators of pre-planned attacks, the spontaneous perpetrators are much younger, less educated, and more likely to be unemployed. The spontaneous attacks are occurring in more affluent places with fewer minorities and immigrants, which makes them of equal importance to planned attacks. What can be concluded from these differences is that according to the author, poor and uneducated young people are less able to participate in complex and pre-planned operations, so they carry out spontaneous ones. In

addition, spontaneous perpetrators have little to lose. They are less concerned with the consequences and more demanding of fame. Older people have several commitments, so they tend to make plans, prepare, and organize to avoid the consequences.

Contemporary Discourse of the Far Right

While racial identity was always a primary component of the identity of far-right activists, it was usually constructed in the context of local political frameworks, the consequence of the declining emphasis on traditional aspects of nationalism led to the embrace of a transnational racial cultural-religious identity. While cooperation and coordination between far-right groups has been limited, many far-right people have taken a global perspective in the way they define their electoral bases and the overarching conflicts and threats facing the white race everywhere.

It seems also that popular past distinctions between different types of white nations and Christian traditions are less important in the face of the growing importance of the global “cultural clash.”

The traumatic consequences of the rise of fascist regimes in Europe in the early 1930s and the growing popularity of far-right parties since the early 1980s has led many social scientists to examine the mechanisms that have contributed to the persuasive rhetoric and propaganda of this political stream.

The author mentions four major themes at the center of the analysis of hatred speech:

1. The justification and exercising of violence
2. Demonization of enemy.
3. Interpretation of historical and contemporary global and domestic events and processes in a way that supports the far-right proposition.
4. Apocalyptic vision of future.

Ideological and intellectual discourse of white racist groups in America reveals that they focus on persecuting other races and minorities and preserving the supremacy of the white race. Their goals have expanded to include a series of social and economic issues of the white working class in America. They are also concerned about saving themselves and the future of their white Christian children and fighting what they consider discrimination against the white race.

The historical and contemporary events lead to the rise of the racism-driven wing of the far right. For example, during the high-profile trial of George Zimmerman, who claimed self-defense following his deadly shooting of the unarmed African American teenager, far-right forums saw a dramatic spike in messages supportive of and legitimizing Zimmerman's actions. Likewise is the case of Dylann Roof, who shot to death nine African American congregants at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, in June 2015, that depicted him as a holy saint securing the existence and future of white people. In addition, white supremacist activists don't just focus on foreign groups and policies. They also participate in various internal discussions regarding the practices of their groups.

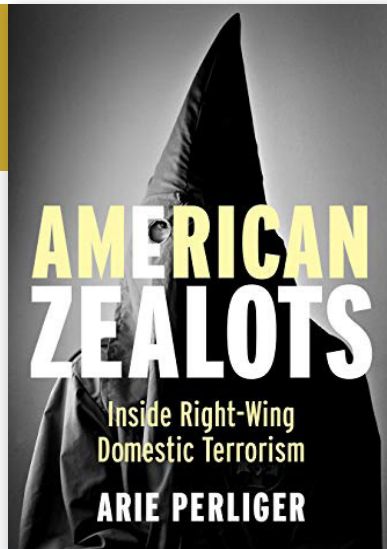
One of the most interesting developments in the skinhead subculture is their reluctance to endorse other violent and criminal acts. For example, the movement sometimes issues an official explanation disavowing violence or some attacks related to it.

Christian Identity and Globalization of the Far Right

Reliance on a unique interpretation of religious texts is still the primary feature of the discourse of the Christian Identity movement. But an equally powerful tendency over the last few years is the association of contemporary events with the movement's overall ideological framework and biblical interpretations. It reflects, according to the author, ideological “creativity,” which aims essentially to point out “signs” of the upcoming apocalypse. While European far-right groups for many years opposed the European Union and the erosion of their states' sovereignty, in the last decade, antiglobalization sentiments have become a central theme of the rhetoric of the American far right as well.

Far-right groups see globalization as an ideology that legitimizes the integration of foreign practices and costumes and eventually erodes national identity of the whites. The more that globalization continues to spread, the more it affects labor markets and economic developments. In the United States, however, antiglobalization sentiments are also fused into traditional perceptions of American exceptionalism. Thus, far-right elements equate adopting global practices with the promotion of the destruction of the United States.





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