

BREAKING POINT: MEDIA FINALLY REPORTING ON VIOLENCE TIED TO RIGHT WING EXTREMISM

In April of Barack Obama's first year in office, right wing America had a collective meltdown when the Department of Homeland Security dared to write a report (pdf) on right wing extremism and the domestic terrorists that could be tied to the movement. Michelle Malkin went into a full mouth froth, declaring that the report was an Obama DHS hit job on conservatives. ABC was quick to join in, documenting more of the responses of "conservatives". Sadly, Obama and the DHS backed down meekly and the concept was quickly scrubbed from public debate.

But attacks carried out by the very types of right wing radicals described in the report have continued. The toll from these attacks appears to have gotten high enough that the media finally has found its voice again and is willing to document the carnage while connecting the dots. After the deadly shootings at a Jewish center in the Kansas City area in April of this year, Peter Bergen and David Sterman penned an op-ed piece carried by CNN. They dared title the piece "U.S. right wing extremists more deadly than jihadists" and produced documentation to back up their damning headline:

In fact, since 9/11 extremists affiliated with a variety of far-right wing ideologies, including white supremacists, anti-abortion extremists and anti-government militants, have killed more people in the United States than have extremists motivated by al Qaeda's ideology. According to a count by the New America Foundation, right wing extremists have killed 34 people in the United States for political reasons since 9/11. (The total includes the

latest shootings in Kansas, which are being [classified as a hate crime](#)).

By [contrast](#), terrorists motivated by al Qaeda's ideology have killed 21 people in the United States since 9/11.

With Sunday's killing of two policemen and a "good guy with a gun" in Las Vegas by another pair of right wing extremists, Paul Waldman was able to take to the blog pages of the Washington Post to tie these violent attacks to the venom-filled rhetoric of the right:

But what I am saying is this: there are some particular features of conservative political rhetoric today that help create an atmosphere in which violence and terrorism can germinate.

The most obvious component is the fetishization of firearms and the constant warnings that government will soon be coming to take your guns. But that's only part of it. Just as meaningful is the conspiracy theorizing that became utterly mainstream once Barack Obama took office. If you tuned into one of many national television and radio programs on the right, you heard over and over that Obama was imposing a totalitarian state upon us. You might hear that FEMA was building secret concentration camps (Glenn Beck, the propagator of that theory, later [recanted it](#), though he has a [long history](#) of violent rhetoric), or that Obama is [seeding the government](#) with agents of the Muslim Brotherhood. You grandfather probably got an email [offering proof](#) that Obama is literally the antichrist.

Writing over at the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, Charles Blair brings us the sobering math on the recent growth of these radical

groups:

For almost 15 years after the Oklahoma City bombing, far-right extremism remained a relative constant; now it has risen again in group numbers, violence, and latent explosiveness. To gain greater clarity on this alarming trajectory, I recently spoke with Mark Potok, an expert in domestic extremism and director of the **Southern Poverty Law Center**. Addressing the numerical ebb and flow with far-right “hate groups” (that is, **US white supremacist and other groups** whose beliefs or practices attack or malign an entire class of people), Potok said, “What we’ve been seeing is a long slow steady rise since 2000—it has gone from 602 groups that year to 1,007 groups in 2012.” The rise was connected to the election of an African-American president and accompanying conspiracy theories, Potok explained; a severe economic recession and fears related to immigration also were factors.

This expansion of hate groups has been paralleled by growth in the number of “**patriot groups**” (defined as US militias and other strongly anti-government related groups that are not primarily white supremacist or racist in orientation). The Southern Poverty Law Center’s count of such groups initially peaked in the mid-1990s, at 858. A steep decline ensued, especially after the so-called Y2K bug—the potential mass demise of computers made before the year 2000—failed to bring about societal chaos, rapture, or a millenarian apocalypse. In 2001, the movement hit its nadir with 150 groups and remained low throughout both of President George W. Bush’s terms.

But in 2009, Potok said, “[t]he patriot group numbers began skyrocketing. By

2011 there were 1,274, and in 2012 the numbers peaked at 1,360.”

The Las Vegas killers were fans of a particularly virulent mix of these hate messages. From the SPLC:

In the days and weeks before the attack, Miller posted a series of comments on his Facebook page indicating that, in order to restore “freedom” to the United States, the “best men” would strike for “a free and just world with our blood, sweat and tears as pavement,” he said on June 2. “There is no greater cause to die for than liberty,” he wrote on May 2. “I will willingly die for liberty.” On March 25, he wrote: “I stand firm in my convictions and stand prepared to die for them. ... Come for me, free me from your slavery. Give me the death a hero deserves.”

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On May 25, 2014, Miller also said on his page that he had been present at the mid-April standoff, some 60 miles outside Las Vegas, between rancher **Cliven Bundy** and federal agents trying to seize his cattle for nonpayment of grazing fees. Bundy, who was backed by hundreds of armed militiamen, ultimately won that battle, as law enforcement officers decided to stand down rather than risk a bloodbath after Bundy’s supporters pointed their weapons at a crowd of federal agents. On April 9, shortly before traveling to the Bundy ranch, Jerad Miller wrote that the standoff was “the next Waco,” a reference to a deadly 1993 standoff in Texas.

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But the bulk of his page made it clear that he saw himself very much as part of

the Patriot, or militia, movement. His profile picture shows two knives and the word "PATRIOT," using a stars and stripes motif. He wrote a great deal about the Second Amendment, calling it a "Freedom Thing." He criticized domestic spying. He cited Patriot gun rights activist Adam Kokesh. He "liked" Three Percenter Nation, a Patriot group headed by a former Alabama militiaman; Operation "American Spring," a failed recent Patriot attempt to mount a huge protest in Washington, D.C.; and the Alliance Defending Freedom, a radical anti-LGBT Christian organization. He also cited a series of smaller gun rights groups approvingly.

Returning to Waldman's piece, there is this chilling conclusion:

And I promise you, these murders in Nevada will not be the last. It may be going too far to say that conservative politicians and media figures whose rhetoric has fed the deranged fantasies of terrorists and killers have blood on their hands. But they shouldn't have a clear conscience, either.

Although it comes too late for many lives that have already been lost, we see at the end of the SPLC piece that Eric Holder is stepping in to cover the void created when DHS backed down from their work on domestic terrorists:

The killing in Las Vegas came just five days after U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder announced that he was reviving a special unit devoted to monitoring domestic terrorism that fell dormant in the aftermath of the 2001 Al Qaeda attacks. Holder pointed out, presciently, that in addition to Islamist terror the nation also faced the threat of "individuals within our

own borders who may be motivated by a variety of causes from anti-government animus to racial prejudice.”

Don't expect the resources to be dedicated to this effort to come anywhere close to the billions of dollars we spend chasing jihadists, but at least both the Department of Justice and the media finally admit that the problem of right wing terrorism is real and growing.