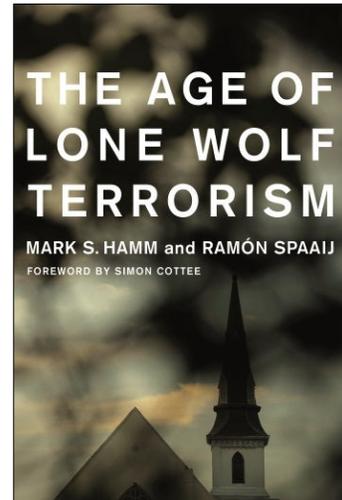Mark S. Hamm and Ramón Spaaij, **The Age of Lone Wolf Terrorism**, New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2017, 322 pp., $35.00 (hardcover), $34.99 (e-book).

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Terrorist violence today increasingly blurs the line between formal and weak affiliation with organized extremist groups, between political and personal motives, and between domestic and ideological violence. This type of mass violence goes by many names. Colloquially, it is sometimes called "lone wolf" terrorism. Elsewhere, it has been called "lone actor violence" (Fredholm, 2016; Richman & Sharan, 2015). A recent landmark report by the FBI's Behavioral Threat Assessment Center referred to the phenomenon as "lone offender terrorism" (FBI, 2019). Perhaps appropriate to the ambiguity of its name and nature, an operational definition of lone offender terrorism is likewise unsettled. Some deny that the lone offender—the lone wolf—even exists.

Mark S. Hamm and Ramón Spaaij aim to settle some of this ambiguity in the new book **The Age of Lone Wolf Terrorism**. In it, the authors make a compelling, data-backed argument that political violence committed by lone offenders has been steadily increasing for decades, and that this increase is particularly marked in the United States. Further, the authors contend that digital communication technology has played an integral role in nearly all lone offender attacks since September 11, 2001. *The Age of Lone Wolf Terrorism* is drawn from a database of 123 cases of lone offender terror attacks, coded for 21 different variables. Using this empirical foundation, the authors identify a slate of behavioral patterns that characterize this category of political violence.

The Age of Lone Wolf Terrorism arrives at a moment when scholars, practitioners, and independent researchers of violent extremism are debating the utility, and indeed even the validity of the lone wolf typology. These readers are the ones to whom Hamm and Spaaij's work will likely offer the most—both to appreciate and challenge. The most critical voices in this debate deny the very existence of lone offender terrorists, arguing that using such a designation "is to disengage each individual incident from the terrorist rhetoric that breeds it" (Kayyem, 2019 p. 2) or to miss lone offenders' "weak or affiliative social ties with radical actors" (Schuurman et al., 2017, p. 773). But Hamm and Spaaij argue convincingly for the term's practical and theoretical utility, pointing out that the term is "generally accepted as valid" by policymakers and law enforcement, and "is an epistemological recognition of the methods, validity, and scope of [a] particular form of political violence" (p. 7). In a short but representative survey, the authors demonstrate that—far from ignoring the role of provocative rhetoric and weak social ties—the core empirical studies central to the topic of lone offenders already integrate these characteristics into their analysis. *The Age of Lone Wolf Terrorism*, like the studies alongside of which it stands, recognizes the ambiguity inherent to its subject.

Patterns of weak social ties and robust communication networks form the core of Hamm and Spaaij's analysis. Of 2,583 data points, the authors distill a six-step radicalization model, of which only the first and final steps (grievance and violent action, respectively) are undertaken alone. The other four behavioral patterns are affinity with online sympathizers or extremist groups, encounters with an enabler who encourages radicalization, communicating intent to commit violence, and a triggering event that precedes an attack (p. 159). Of these, broadcasting intent and affinity for extremist groups are "the most important" and "most common" behavioral patterns of lone offenders (p. 264). The bulk of the book is dedicated to describing these behavioral patterns and illustrating them through case studies drawn from the database.

These categories are useful, particularly as they pertain to digital communication technology and social media formats. The authors point out that almost every case of lone offender terrorism since 9/11 has included an integral online dimension. If developing extremist affinities and broadcasting violent intent are central to the radicalization of lone wolves, then mass digital communication technology's ready gateway to extremist content and audiences would certainly enable those two behaviors. The authors stop short of positing a causal link between the rise in lone offender violence and the spread of digital communication. However, this correlation offers a promising site for future research and analysis. For example, the increasingly idiosyncratic patterns of ideology displayed by lone offenders would seem to reflect patterns of radicalization in a communicative environment where myriad extremist doctrines are a mere hypertext click away. By the same token, much controversy surrounding the very term "lone wolf" might stem from the manner in which digital communication technology and social media formats have unsettled old assumptions of sociality. Hamm (a criminologist) and Spaaij (a sociologist whose other works focus on sports cultures) have little to say in this regard, beyond noting the strong correlation. But far from a point of criticism, this is one of *The Age of Lone Wolf Terrorism*'s primary appeals. By placing its findings in the larger context of scholarly and popular critiques of the lone wolf typology, one might open a space for inquiry as to changes in the construction of the ideological subject in an age of mass digital communication.

That is not to say that Hamm and Spaaij's models are flawless. At times, they are overly broad. As operationalized in this book, communications ranging from detailed threats against specific individuals to more general expression of radical politics to wide-ranging symptoms of acute mental health crises, all come under the category of "broadcasting intent." Likewise, Hamm and Spaaij's "enabler" category would seem to include an array of influences, from conspiracy bloggers to abusive friends and family to demagogic provocateurs who seek by their public rhetoric to trigger unstable lone wolves (sometimes known as "stochastic terrorism"). The very broadness of these categories opens space for further work theorizing and analyzing the role of sociality and communication in lone offender violence. However, if *The Age of Lone Wolf Terrorism* is to inform prevention tactics, as the authors suggest, these categories need further refinement.

Two later chapters, "Lone Wolf Sting Operations" and "Lone Wolf Terrorism and FBI Mythmaking," indicate how such practical application might proceed. These chapters offer balanced, well-supported, and nonpolemical critiques of FBI terrorism sting strategies. The authors argue that stings "are designed to push suspects in the direction of . . . violence, rather than push them toward a means for addressing personal problems that can be at the heart of a violent tendency" (p. 260). The FBI, the authors argue, offer the

means for disturbed individuals to develop extremist affinities, listen to enabling voices, and broadcast their intentions. While this may not amount to entrapment in a legal sense, it is ethically insupportable for law enforcement to act as the agents of such harm. These chapters join a body of literature, from Trevor Aaronson's (2013) *The Terror Factory* to Arun Kundnani's (2015) *A Decade Lost*, in indicting key counterterror strategies of the 2000s and 2010s. However, Hamm and Spaaij do not seem to share the radical politics that characterize so much of this literature. This redounds to the credibility of their critique, and to the likelihood that policymakers and law enforcement might take it to heart.

At the present time, passions run too high to expect that *The Age of Lone Wolf Terrorism* will end debate over the utility of the lone offender typology. Likewise, its broad operational categories make this book an unlikely foundation on which to build a coherent theoretical approach to the issue. And while some of its findings speak to immediate possible changes in the prosecution of these crimes, further operational refinement will be necessary if Hamm and Spaaij's work is to act as a guide for policy. The book's greatest strength lies in its ability to inspire an entire category of inquiry, which might inform future studies and critical interpretations of lone offender terrorism. This inquiry speaks directly to the shifting nature of sociality in an age of digital communication technology and social media formats. It may provoke readers to wonder whether the weak social ties and robust communicative potentials of online spaces are indeed adequate substitutes for the influence of organized terror networks. Based on the authors' capable interpretation of an extensive dataset, it seems a strong possibility that they are.

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