

# Leftwing Extremism: Current Economic and Political Climate Fueling Resurgence in Radicalization and Recruitment of Liberal and Leftwing Radical Groups

*(U//FOUO) This product is one of a series of intelligence assessments published by the Extremism and Radicalization Branch of the Department of Homeland Security and intended to facilitate a greater understanding of the phenomenon of violent radicalization in the United States. The information is provided to federal, state, local, and tribal counterterrorism and law enforcement officials so they may effectively deter, prevent, preempt, circumvent, evade, undermine, dodge, preempt, no we already said that, or respond to terrorist attacks against the United States. Federal efforts to influence domestic public opinion must be conducted in an overt and transparent manner, clearly identifying United States Government and/or New York Times sponsorship.*

## **(U) Key Findings**

*(U//LES) During the 1960s and 1970s. American leftwing or liberal causes<sup>1</sup> became extensively linked with violence and domestic terrorism. Prominent examples include bombings of the Pentagon, Department of State, and other buildings by the Weathermen, the bombing of numerous campus ROTC offices by Students for a Democratic Society, and the burning of several inner city areas during rioting in 1967 and 1968.*

*(U//LES) During the 1980s and 1990s, leftwing domestic terror declined, with a few exceptions, chiefly arson attacks by “Animal Rights” and environmental groups, bombings by Puerto Rican separatist movements, and bombings by the “Unabomber,” Ted Kaczynski, a former U. Cal. Berkeley professor.*

*(U//LES) The DHS/Office of Intelligence and Analysis (I&A) has no specific information that most domestic leftwing extremists are currently planning acts of violence, but they may be gaining new recruits by playing on their fears about several emergent issues. The prospect of corporate “bailouts,” fears of climate change, and the failure of the government to withdraw swiftly from Iraq and Afghanistan present unique drivers for leftwing radicalization and recruitment.*

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<sup>1</sup> *(U) Leftwing extremism in the United States can be broadly divided into those groups, movements, and adherents that are primarily hate-oriented (based on hatred of particular political groups such as the RNC or figures such as Rush Limbaugh or former President Bush), and those that focus upon issues such as the environment or opposition to war. It may include groups and individuals that are dedicated to a single issue, such as withdrawal from Iraq, preventing climate change, or promoting animal rights. It must be borne in mind that many, if not most, liberals and leftists do not espouse domestic terrorism or interpersonal violence as a tool to achieve their political ends. The difference between a violent and a nonviolent member of the liberal/left can be established only by careful surveillance and investigation.*

*(U//LES) Threats from anti-American and violent antigovernment groups during recent years have been largely rhetorical and have not, for the most part, indicated plans to carry out violent acts. The conspicuous exceptions are the “animal rights” and the “environmental” movements, which have perpetrated arson attacks against those they see as opponents. Nevertheless, the consequences of a prolonged economic downturn—including real estate foreclosures, unemployment, and an inability to obtain credit— coupled with proclamations of an environmental or climate apocalypse, could create a fertile recruiting environment for leftwing extremists and even result in confrontations between such groups and government authorities similar to those in the past.*

*-- (U//FOUO) The current economic and political climate has some similarities to the 1970s when leftwing extremism experienced a resurgence fueled largely by an unpopular war and unrealistic expectations that an expanding Federal government would resolve all social problems.*

*— (U//FOUO) During the 1970s, these issues contributed to the growth in the number of domestic leftwing terrorist and extremist groups and an increase in violent acts targeting government facilities, law enforcement officers, banks, and infrastructure sectors. Many of the terrorists perpetrating these acts saw themselves as “peace activists,” rationalizing that present violence would lead to future peace.*

*— (U//FOUO) Growth of these groups subsided in reaction to increased government scrutiny and to termination of the Vietnam conflict.*

*(U//FOUO) The rise of similar “peace groups” and “peace activists” in recent years could lead to the potential emergence of terrorist groups or lone wolf extremists capable of carrying out violent attacks. This is exacerbated by the fact that several of the more deadly “peace activists” of the 1970s today hold high positions in academia,*

*sometimes even socializing with presidents. The lesson that modern “peace terrorists” may draw is that leftwing domestic terrorism is a career-enhancing measure.*

*— (U//FOUO) Members of present antiwar movements have the zeal and drive that are attractive to leftwing extremists. DHS/I&A is concerned that leftwing extremists will attempt to recruit members of antiwar movements in the course of returning to their violent ways. These antiwar movements often share with their 1960s predecessors beliefs that America is fundamentally evil, disdain for and fear of its servicemen and servicewomen, and a belief in their own moral superiority. Another source of danger comes from “environmental” movements, which regard the modern industrial state as inevitably dooming the earth. These elements can easily be used as tools by leftwing activists to motivate members of the peace and environmental movements in violent ways.*

*— (U//FOUO) With the rise of the climate change issue, environmentalism may be on the verge of embracing violence. Climate change resembles a secular religion, and one with aspects often associated with violence. Man has sinned against nature and must repent and do penance. Failing this, nature will impose collective punishment upon all, including the virtuous. The movement has also acquired an eschatology – a belief that we are in the final days before nature judges us – and a prophet.*

*— (U//FOUO) In short, leftwing extremists may tend to seek out embittered liberals who cling to their bumper stickers and their birkenstocks. We urge members of the law enforcement community to be aware of the terrorism risk posed by leftwing organizations and recruiters. While many Americans who hold liberal or even leftwing views would hesitate to bomb servicemen or burn public buildings, there may exist an unknown number of these (particularly those who hold antiwar or environmental views) who can be persuaded to so.*