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The Ku Klux Klan: America's Long History of Tolerating White Terrorist Organizations

By Garikai Chengu
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This week marks the 150th anniversary of the founding of America's deadliest terrorist organization: the Klu Klux Klan.

Since September 11, extremists associated with various far-right wing ideologies, including the KKK and Jewish extremists, have killed far more people in the United States than extremists motivated by radical Islam.

One centuries' old example of US government double standards when it comes to terrorism, is the infamous Klu Klux Klan. The Klan has terrorized and killed far more Americans than Islamic terrorists ever have; and despite being America's oldest terrorist organization, the US government does not officially consider the KKK a terrorist organization, classifying it merely as a "hate group".

By classifying the KKK's actions as hate rather than terror, the US government allows the Klan, unlike ISIS, to freely hold rallies in America, fundraise, and even appear on TV to promote their ideology. Recently Franc Ancona, a KKK leader, appeared on national television and threatened "lethal force" against black protestors.

The KKK was founded just days after slavery was abolished in America; and ever since then, bombings, lynchings, tar-and-featherings, and other violent forms of terrorism on those challenging white supremacy have always been the hallmark of the Klan. At its peak in the 1920s, Klan membership exceeded the equivalent of 8 million Americans nationwide.

The simple fact that, to this day, the U.S. Government refuses to designate the KKK as a domestic terrorist organization speaks volumes about the nation's commitment to combating terrorism and promoting racial equality.

The deadliest terrorist attack on US soil, prior to 9/11, was the Oklahoma City bombing, which was masterminded by Timothy McVeigh, a man who had deep ties to far-right Nazi militant circles. In 2011, Kevin Harpham, who was a war veteran, placed a bomb along the route of a Martin Luther King Jr. Day parade. In 2012, Wade Michael Page killed six innocent people in a shooting at a Sikh temple in Wisconsin. Page was a member of a white supremacist band and associated with the Hammerskins, a violent neo-Nazi group. A few months ago an Imperial Grand Wizard of the KKK from Kansas, went on a killing spree whilst shouting "Heil Hitler", in which a fourteen-year-old boy was among the dead.

Despite the growing number of mass shootings and terrorist attacks by the far right, the media chooses to focus almost exclusively on the lesser threat of radical Islam. Media pundits routinely demand that moderate Muslims condemn acts of violence perpetrated by Muslims. When was the last time that you have seen white priests being pressured to go on television to denounce violence by white supremacists in order to show that "not all Christians" are like that? How long would a Muslim group, with as violent a record as the KKK, be allowed to operate freely before it was shut down by Homeland Security? Clearly racism, as much as oil, fuels the War on Terror.

The threat of homegrown Islamic terrorism has been largely manufactured so that the so-called War on Terror can promote profitable militarism abroad and erode civil liberties at home.

Fourteen years after 9/11, al Qaeda has not successfully conducted another attack inside the United States. According to a recent Harvard University report, named *The Exaggerated Threat of Home Grown Terror*, "... since 2001, despite warnings by public officials and terrorism analysts, there is little evidence that the risk of terrorist attacks in the United States by American Muslims is especially serious or growing."

So why then has the United States spent over \$6 trillion dollars on the War on Terror?

FBI data from 1980 to 2005 show that Jewish terrorists committed 7 percent of the acts of terrorism within the United States, which was more than the 6 percent committed by Islamist extremists. This statistic is made even more remarkable by the fact that the FBI drastically undercounts instances of terrorism perpetrated by Jewish extremists because of institutional racial double standards. How many Americans can name the Jewish Defense League or Jewish Armed Resistance, both terror groups that have committed more acts of terror than their Muslim counterparts?

The infamous Jewish Defense League has been operating in the U.S. for over half a century. A Department of Energy report on terror threats to nuclear facilities notes, "...for more than a decade, the Jewish Defense League has been one of the most active terrorist groups in the United States." Unbeknown to many Americans, these Jewish extremists have mail-bombed police, targeted UN ambassadors, and firebombed civilians at a Symphony Orchestra performance.

If the U.S. Government is serious about combating domestic terror and mass shootings, the FBI's statistics suggest that it should be aggressively surveilling white males. The simple fact that U.S. law enforcement has not infiltrated and spied on conservative Christian or Jewish communities to disrupt violent rightwing extremism confirms what Muslims in America know in their bones: to worship Allah is to be a suspect.

Muslim-Americans increasingly feel as though they are living in a totalitarian police state with worsening harassment, profiling, and surveillance by the state. Researcher, Arun Kundnani, has shown how the FBI has 1 counterterrorism spy for every 94 Muslims in the US, which approaches totalitarian East Germany's infamous spy agency Stasi's ratio of 1 spy for every 66 citizens.

White Christians and Jews don't have to worry that an undercover agent or informant has infiltrated their churches, student groups, or social clubs.

For centuries, white terrorists in America have been allowed ample breathing room to spread their ideology and to plan and orchestrate their attacks, which explains both the greater relative lethality of white supremacist terrorism, and also the much lower rate of indictment for white perpetrators.

In America Brown and Black people are reflexively considered terrorists, thugs and gangbangers, deserving of society's derision, whereas white people who commit terrorist attacks are simply "mentally disturbed" loners who were in need of society's help.

Society's decision to call a particular act of violence 'terrorism' indicates that the act belongs to a more widespread pattern that needs consideration beyond normal crime fighting. Calling mass shootings by white supremacists merely "hate" or murder, rather than terrorism, downplays the significant role of the perpetrator's racist motives and avoids tough questions about the prevalence of racism in American society.

Recently, James Holmes shot over 80 people in a movie theatre but he was brought in alive by law enforcement and the media refused to call his actions terrorism, focusing instead on portraying Mr. Holmes as an “awkward” and tender “loner”. Similarly, white supremacist Dylan Roof massacred nine black churchgoers in Charlestown and not only was Roof brought in alive by law enforcement, but also the police described Roof at the time of his arrest as “very quiet, very calm ... not problematic.” The police even went so far as to buy Mr. Roof lunch at Burger King, moments after he unleashed terror on innocent churchgoers. Contrasted with the police’s countless modern day lynchings of innocent and often unnamed black boys and men, it is clear that US law enforcement is as tolerant of white terrorism as it is institutionally racist to its core.

Clearly, there is a costly and unhealthy obsession among U.S. society and law enforcement, with preventing violence perpetrated by American Muslims, one that ignores both the real threat of white terrorism and the ongoing terrorism by police towards Black American citizens.