Against the War on Terrorism

Peter Gelderloos

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It surprised me, a little bit, to notice the other day on wikileaks, a website that anonymously publishes classified government documents, that my name is mentioned in the recent Virginia Terrorism Threat Assessment. Under the heading "Anarchist Extremists," I am singularly identified as an anarchist of note. We "anarchist extremists" make the top of the list for Virginia's domestic terrorism threats, well above white supremacist groups that have actually killed people. Polluting factories, weapons companies, negligent employers, the nuclear power plant, the prison guards union — none of these even make the list, although they too are responsible for death counts infinitely higher than the state's meek anarchists, who content themselves with writing, protesting, organizing social centers, distributing free food, and perhaps occasionally sabotaging property of corporate and governmental targets.

The information reported in the section on anarchists reveals that, on the one hand, security experts in Virginia are collecting information on people like myself in over a dozen counties across the state, and on the other hand, these security experts are blundering idiots who haven't the slightest clue about anarchist theory and practice and cannot distinguish between real anarchist organizations that have been active for years and ironic fake names signed to humorous communiques and pamphlets. I have no doubt that my name is the only one cited in the Terrorism Threat Assessment section on anarchists because I am the only Virginia anarchist whose name comes up on a google search, since I've written a book or two and my name has been referenced in the media in relation to a couple trials.

I also have no doubt as to what tactics the FBI and police consider fair to use against people they are assessing as terrorists. One of the few things that may limit their regularly exercised power to surveille, harass, frame, imprison, torture, and

even kill is the extent to which good citizens go along with it or look the other way. Of course they have to be a bit more gentle with people like me — white and from the middle class — although recent years have shown that they have cowed American society enough that they can get away with locking up even such similarly privileged people for over 22 years for burning down a genetic research laboratory in a political action which harmed no one. Burning down a laboratory is illegal, but the fact of the matter is that the government has left no legal means for stopping an industry for which no public mandate exists and which irrevocably changes all of our lives and the very future of our planet — genetic engineering. We were never consulted on this, nor on any of the other policies or economic developments that are changing — hell, let's be honest, destroying — our lives. We certainly didn't all vote to funnel a huge portion of our society's wealth to the banks to bail out them out from a crisis they created at our expense, and the government gives us no legal means to punish the banks or take a little of that wealth back. Some people have a sycophantic respect for the law above all other ethical values, anarchists do not.

This is why anarchists are currently a major focus of the government's domestic War on Terror. And due to the fact that we respect human needs and the environment instead of respecting the law, it has become easy to prosecute us as terrorists, since the federal government changed the definition of terrorism to illegal activity intended to pressure or change government policy.

Frankly, there was a popular mandate, engineered by the mass media, to fight a war against terrorism, because after September 11th the majority of Americans were gullible enough to believe their government, forgetting for a tragic moment how many times they've gotten burned before. The government, of course, lost no time in sentimentality; the same day the Twin Towers came down, George W. Bush was calling it "an opportunity" in a meeting of the National Security Council. Internationally, they immediately began mobilizing for a war against Iraq, a war which they didn't ask us for permission to wage, although many of us consented to understanding it as part of the War on Terror. Domestically, the government immediately framed the War on Terror as *primarily* a campaign against Muslims, indigenous people, environmental activists, animal rights activists, and anarchists.

In 2003, the single largest domestic anti-terror investigation of the FBI, utilizing five times more wiretaps than the second largest case, targeted an animal rights campaign that has never even been accused of killing anyone. This campaign, Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty, ran a website and spread information about Huntingdon Life Sciences, the largest vivisection company of the UK that also does a lot of business in the US, torturing and killing thousands of animals every year for such noble causes as the cosmetics industry. If anonymous people carried out a protest or a sabotage action against HLS or a company that did business with

them, the SHAC campaign reported it on their website. The US government specifically passed a law, the Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act, allowing them to lock these activists up for running a website and coordinating a protest campaign. One assumes that if the six people sent to prison had been doing anything previously considered illegal, with all the FBI surveillance on them they would have been caught and prosecuted for that. Instead, the government changed the laws and sent them to prison as terrorists — because they were effective.

In a defining policy from which President Obama has declined to deviate, George W. Bush declared, "You are with us, or you are with the terrorists." We, the non-self-identified terrorists, people who believe in freedom for everyone, people willing to damage inanimate property to save a forest, people who defend ourselves against police violence, have to agree: you are with the government, or you are a terrorist. And if you do not support us in our terrorism, which is to say our respect for life and contempt for the law, then you are supporting the government when they come to take us away.

I think everyone who fights for change recognizes that there are no legal ways for workers to protect themselves from the crisis, for people to regain control over their communities and have a say in the decisions that effect their lives, for prisoners to protect themselves from torture, for indigenous nations to have even just their treaty rights respected, for poor communities to stop the pollution of their air and water. I'm not asking that everyone agree on what tactics are appropriate and necessary in the face of this quandary, nor demanding that readers accept the anarchist proposal that government and capitalism must be destroyed to solve these problems. I am only pointing out that what we are dedicating our lives to is the solution of these problems, and for this we have been labelled terrorists, and for this we are being spirited off to prison one by one. This War on Terrorism requires the passive support of all those who have not yet been "assessed" as terrorists. First they come for the most radical. Eventually they'll come for you. It's high time for everyone to hang a banner from their window: "I oppose the War on Terror. Ask me why!"

The future, whether me and my friends end up in prison, whether this country becomes more and more totalitarian, whether the environment is completely destroyed, is up to the millions of people sitting on the fence, skeptical of the government, but hesitant to break the rules of the game that is so clearly stacked against them.

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