

# Stochastic Terrorism: Triggering the Shooters.

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By G2geek – Monday January 10, 2011 · 5:37 PM PST

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**Stochastic terrorism** is the use of mass communications to stir up random lone wolves to carry out violent or terrorist acts that are statistically predictable but individually unpredictable. This is what occurs when Bin Laden releases a video that stirs random extremists halfway around the globe to commit a bombing or shooting.

This is also the term for what Beck, O'Reilly, Hannity, and others do. And this is what led directly and predictably to a number of cases of ideologically-motivated murder similar to the Tucson shootings [of U.S. Representative Gabby Giffords and others on Jan. 8, 2011].

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## **Update: the mechanism spelled out.**

(This update is to resolve some ambiguity.)

The person who actually plants the bomb or assassinates the public official is not the stochastic terrorist, they are the "missile" set in motion by the stochastic terrorist. The stochastic terrorist is the person who uses mass media as their means of setting those "missiles" in motion.

Here's the mechanism spelled out concisely:

The stochastic terrorist is the person who uses mass media to broadcast memes that incite unstable people to commit violent acts.

One or more unstable people responds to the incitement by becoming a lone wolf and committing a violent act. While their action may have been statistically predictable (e.g. "given the provocation, someone will probably do such-and-such"), the specific person and the specific act are not predictable (yet).

The stochastic terrorist then has plausible deniability: "Oh, it was just a lone nut, nobody could have predicted he would do that, and I'm not responsible for what people in my audience do."

The lone wolf who was the "missile" gets captured and sentenced to life in prison, while the stochastic terrorist keeps his prime time slot and goes on to incite more lone wolves.

Further, the stochastic terrorist may be acting either negligently or deliberately, or may be in complete denial of their impact, just like a drunk driver who runs over a pedestrian without even realizing it.

Finally, there is no conspiracy here: merely the twisted acts of individuals who are promoting extremism, who get access to national media in which to do it, and the rest follows naturally just as an increase in violent storms follows from an increase in average global temperature.

And now we return to the rest of the original diary...

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### **The lone wolves.**

The term "lone wolf" is used in law enforcement and intel to refer to an individual who is emotionally unstable, who lacks obvious ties to known criminal gangs or terrorist groups, and who pops up seemingly out of nowhere to commit a violent or terrorist act.

The three-letter agencies can keep an eye on organized groups, and do a damn good job at stopping violent actors associated with those groups. At least three intended car bombings were stopped last year by the FBI intercepting the bombers and substituting fake explosives in time to save hundreds of lives and arrest the would-be bombers.

Lone wolves don't have obvious connections through which they can be discovered. They don't communicate much if at all about their intentions. They keep their plans to themselves. And then, apparently at random, they pop up from obscurity and commit murder. They are law enforcement's and intel's worst nightmare, and on Saturday one of them became America's nightmare.

### **Stirring the pot.**

At any given time there are hundreds of thousands of Americans with combinations of personality characteristics (such as emotional instability, a paranoid ideology, and a propensity for violence) that put them at risk of going off the deep end and becoming lone wolves. All it takes is the right push, the right nudge at the right time, to dislodge a few of them and send them on their way to fifteen minutes of fame surrounded by dead bodies.

There's nothing mysterious about this process. It is not much different to other instances where a person is almost ready to make a decision, and the right combination of inputs makes them act. For example you have an old car and it begins to break down more often: now you're thinking about replacing it, and you might be swayed by something in an automobile advertisement. Anyone who is familiar with marketing and advertising knows how this works, and advertisers often target their messages to people who are "ready to buy" and just need a little persuading. Political candidates often target their ads to the undecideds, hoping that a little nudge will win them some votes. This is perfectly normal and hardly insidious.

It becomes insidious when these practices are used in such a manner as to deliberately or negligently stir up lone wolf violence.

So let's take Beck, Hannity, and O'Reilly. There is no question that their emotional rhetoric appeals to people who are emotionally unstable. And, since their audiences are tracked and analyzed in detail, there is no question that they know it.

When they go on TV and shout and sputter, rant and rave, and weep and wail, they are not expecting to persuade liberals or even undecideds to change their votes. They are "playing to their base," that they know includes people who are emotionally unstable. In short they are "stirring the pot." And if you turn up the temperature and keep stirring, you know that the pot will boil. Little bubbles will come up from the depths and pop.

### **Pop go the lone wolves.**

Some lone wolves have no provable connection to the hate-talkers and pot-stirrers, other than memes in common. One example of this type is James Wenneker von Brunn who shot and killed security guard Stephen Tyrone Johns at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum. Another is Andrew Joseph Stack III, who flew a Piper Dakota into the Austin Texas field office of the Internal Revenue Service, killing IRS manager Vernon Hunter and himself, and injuring thirteen others. At this point it appears as if Jared Loughner is one of these: all-over-the-map crazy, with an incoherent ideology that is mostly rightwing but difficult to trace to specific sources.

(UPDATE: to be very clear about this: at this point I am not aware of any evidence to suggest that Loughner falls under the definition of stochastic terrorism, because there is nothing yet to link him to being a fan of one of the mass media hate-talkers. However there are enough other cases out there to make this issue topical and relevant right now.)

On the other hand...

**On 27 July 2008**, lone wolf shooter Jim David Adkisson walked into the Tennessee Valley Unitarian Universalist Church and shot nine people, killing two and wounding seven.

Adkisson said he was motivated by hatred of "Democrats, liberals, n-----s, and faggots." A police search of his home found books by Michael Savage, Sean Hannity, and Bill O'Reilly.

On 4 February 2009, he accepted a plea bargain: guilty on two counts of murder, in exchange for a life sentence w/o possibility of parole (LWOP).

**On 4 April 2009**, Richard Poplawski shot five Pittsburgh PA police officers, leaving three dead and two seriously wounded.

According to people who knew him, he was a birther and white supremacist, was paranoid that Obama was going to take away his guns, and was consumed with anti-semitic conspiracy theories. A police search of his computer found links to various groups and to a YouTube video of Glenn Beck talking about FEMA concentration camps.

Poplawski's trial has been delayed until 25 April 2011, where it is possible he will face the death penalty for the murder of police officers.

**On 31 May 2009**, lone wolf Scott Roeder shot and killed gynecologist Dr. George Tiller while Tiller was attending church services. At first it appeared that he acted alone, but research by some fellow Kossaks and I uncovered evidence that he had at least one accomplice. That issue is presently being investigated by a federal grand jury.

In the months leading up to the assassination, Bill O'Reilly had waged a "relentless campaign" against Tiller, a campaign of exactly the type that would be expected to stir up violence against the doctor. The details can be found here: <http://www.salon.com/...>

In January 2010 Roeder was convicted of first-degree murder and sentenced to life without parole. At present his accomplices and enablers have not yet been indicted and charged.

**On 18 July 2010**, Byron Williams set out from his mother's home in Groveland CA, heading for San Francisco to shoot up the Tides Foundation and the ACLU, with the intention of "starting a revolution."

Williams, a convicted felon (two bank robberies), was stopped by the CHP (California Highway Patrol) for weaving in and out of traffic at high speed. When stopped, he immediately opened fire on the CHP officers, wounding two. They returned fire, wounding him in the leg, and then took him into custody. At first they thought they were dealing with a garden-variety cop shooter. Then they found the notebook in his car, with the details of his plans.

Quoting the Wikipedia article on Williams: <http://en.wikipedia.org/...>

Quote: **Williams has identified Glenn Beck as his primary motivation for the shootings.** According to Williams, Beck is "like a schoolteacher on TV... he's been breaking open some of the most hideous corruption." Continuing: "Beck would never say anything about a conspiracy, would never advocate violence. He'll never do anything ... of this nature. But he'll give you **every ounce of evidence that you could possibly need.**" End quote.

Prior to Williams' planned attack, Beck had mentioned the obscure Tides Foundation 29 times on his program. He had drawn numerous charts on his infamous blackboard, showing how Tides is the funding source behind much of the "liberal conspiracy." He had stoked and fueled, turned up the heat on the pot, and stirred it real good. He devoted two of his broadcasts to Tides in the very week preceding the shooting.

Quoting the Washington Post article: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/...>

Quote: Beck has at times spoken against violence, but he more often forecasts it, warning that "it is only a matter of time before an actual crazy person really does something stupid." Most every broadcast has some violent imagery: "The clock is ticking. . . . The war is just

beginning. . . . Shoot me in the head if you try to change our government. . . . You have to be prepared to take rocks to the head. . . . The other side is attacking. . . . There is a coup going on. . . . Grab a torch! . . . Drive a stake through the heart of the bloodsuckers. . . . They are taking you to a place to be slaughtered. . . . They are putting a gun to America's head. . . . Hold these people responsible." Unquote.

### **Every ounce of evidence you could possibly need.**

One dead doctor.

Two dead churchgoers.

Seven wounded churchgoers.

Three dead police officers.

Four wounded police officers.

How many more that I couldn't remember while writing this?

Meanwhile the jury is still out on whether Loughner's victims belong on the list of people who "got Becketed."

As someone on dKos wrote in a comment about this a few months ago, there was a saying among his buddies in the Air Force: "Once is a tragedy, twice is a terrible coincidence, three times is enemy action."

**If you were a media personality** known for rants & raves on the air, and it came out that some random killer had possibly been influenced by you or one of your colleagues, what would you do? Would you apologize? Would you tone it down?

If it happened again, what would you do? And if it happened yet again after that? What would you do?

It takes more than just a special type of sociopath to fail to be moved by the murders of doctors, churchgoers, and police officers in the line of duty, and the could-have-been-murders of more.

I submit to you that it takes something between callous disregard and deliberate intent.

### **Pulling the trigger by remote control.**

If you wanted certain people dead, but you wanted plausible deniability, you would have someone else do the deed for you at a distance, the greater the distance the better.

One way to do it would be to use your position on radio or TV to hurl emotional rhetoric that is calculated to appeal to people who are psychologically unstable. Some of them will go out and vote, some will go forth and spread your rant-memes, some will get into bar-room brawls over one issue or another.

But a few, who have already demonstrated a lack of respect for the law, will do more than that. Maybe they'll assault someone on the street who is black or gay or speaking Spanish in public or wearing traditional Islamic garb. Maybe they'll make a bomb and put it in the mail or plant it at a women's clinic.

Maybe they'll go out and shoot someone. Maybe they'll shoot someone who, in your heart of hearts, you want dead. If you have a list of targets in mind, such as Operation Rescue's website with crosshairs on doctors, or Palin's crosshairs on elected officials, it won't matter who gets killed first and who gets killed later: any hit will do.

This is stochastic terrorism: you heat up the waters and stir the pot, knowing full well that sooner or later a lone wolf will pop up and do the deed. The fact that it will happen is as predictable as the fact that a heated pot of water will eventually boil. But the exact time and place of each incident will remain as random as the appearance of the first bubbles in the boiling pot.

And so the unstable shooter, the sick kid or crazy grownup, will be taken into custody where they will rant a disconnected version of your own rants. The fact that they are clearly nuts will enable shifting the public discussion away from your hateful rhetoric and toward the overt insanity of the shooter or bomber.

After that, you get to go on the air and tut-tut along with everyone else, and say Oh So Sad, and all that crap. But behind the scenes you drink a toast and cheer: one down, a bunch more to go.

Or perhaps you're just crazy enough to truly believe that you really don't have anything to do with it. You collect your media star paycheck and tootle along to the next day in front of cameras and microphones, ready to do it again, as oblivious as the drunk driver who runs over a flock of schoolchildren and keeps driving, and then when the cops pull him over, says "Who, me??"

### **The guilty-knowledge test.**

Someone needs to corral Beck, Hannity, O'Reilly, Savage, and the rest of them, in front of a microphone and camera that are not of their own choosing.

For example think of Sixty Minutes and their famed unannounced appearances at the offices and even homes of various wrongdoers over the years. Or think of press conferences or other scheduled appearances, where someone pops up and asks the inconvenient question or two, and the question captures the headlines.

And someone needs to ask them: In light of this latest in a series of ideologically-motivated murders, are you willing to tone down your rhetoric even a little?

Listen very closely to their answers. They will duck and weave, evade and deny, or at most give the standard reply of "lone nuts, oh so sad." But they may also let slip a subtle hint of guilty knowledge.

The author of the aforementioned WaPo article says in passing, "It's not fair to blame Beck for violence committed by people who watch his show."

I say it damn well is fair to blame them when it happens again and again and predictably again. Once is a tragedy, twice is a coincidence, three times is enemy action.

And now we know how it's done: stir the pot and wait for the inevitable, and then deny it and do it again. That's stochastic terrorism as surely as when Bin Laden does it. And Beck and his fellow hate-mongers are terrorists by remote control.

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