

Right-wing extremists aspire to CBRN weapons use

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During the past two decades, attack plots involving CBRN weapons have largely been associated with militant Islamists. The increase in right-wing extremist militant activity in the United States and Western Europe since 2015 has entailed individuals looking towards use of CBRN weapons. *Dr Stephan Blancke* assesses the risks posed

Key Points

- Right-wing extremists online regularly discuss the use of CBRN weapons in attacks as well as claiming a presence within sensitive institutions and positions in the military.
- During the past two decades, numerous right-wing extremist plots involving CBRN weapons have been foiled in the United States and Europe.
- Although plots involving CBRN weapons can leave the would-be perpetrators more at risk of detection by authorities, the impact of a successful attack means that it remains an aspiration for some within the extremist milieu.

Chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) terrorism is predominantly viewed in connection with Islamist militancy, with numerous plots involving CBRN weapons being foiled during the past two decades. On 9 January, Asia Siddiqui – who, according to prosecutors, was “inspired by radical Islam” – was sentenced to 15 years in prison after pleading guilty to “teaching or distributing information pertaining to the making and use of an explosive, destructive device, and weapon of mass destruction in furtherance of a planned federal crime of violence”. A co-defendant in the case, Noelle Velentzas, was awaiting sentencing at the time of writing.

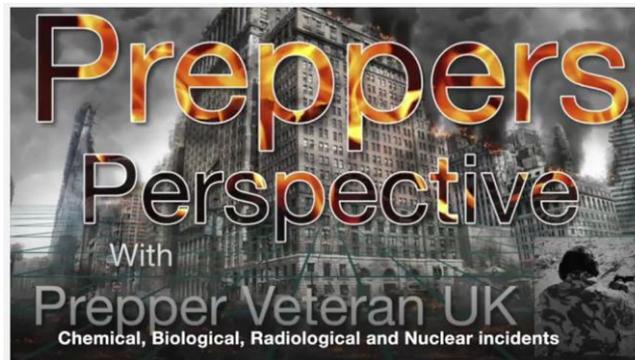
In Europe, the *EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2019*, published on 27 June 2019, lists three foiled CBRN terrorist attacks in 2018 – all with an Islamist background – and declares as a general risk, “The barrier for gaining knowledge on the use of CBRN weapons has decreased. The handling and containment of biological agents, which used to be a major challenge, has become more feasible.” In view of the increasing virulence of right-wing terrorist activities and their international networking, the use of CBRN weapons by right-wing extremists is a prevalent issue.

As well as militant Islamists, right-wing extremist organisations and individuals have not only shown interest in such substances but have also been attempting to deploy them. The founding member of neo-Nazi group Atomwaffen Division (AWD), Brandon Clint Russell, was jailed in January 2018 for five years after pleading guilty to the charge of possession of an unregistered destructive device and unlawful storage of explosive materials. When Russell was charged in 2017, the criminal complaint stated that the radioactive isotopes thorium and americium had been found in his possession. Another alleged AWD member, Devon Arthurs, who is in custody in a medical facility to

be assessed to stand trial charged with two counts of murder, to which he pleaded not guilty, reported to the authorities on plans by AWD to attack nuclear power plants.

Development to date

The conviction of several right-wing extremists during the past two decades and postings on social media platforms illustrate the aspirations of individual right-wing extremists and groups to obtain and deploy CBRN weapons. Although precise goals between specific groups and individuals may differ, they are generally aimed at targeting identity groups, religious minorities, state authorities and political opponents, punishing or changing 'degenerated' (Western) society as a whole, causing unrest and civil war or – as can be observed with Christian fundamentalist, right-wing esoteric neo-Pagan groups and occult Satanic sects – wiping out the existing world. One of the most influential works of the right-wing extremist milieu to date – the *Turner Diaries* by William Luther Pierce, published in 1978 – describes the destruction of the White House with a nuclear weapon as well as various attack scenarios on nuclear reactors and similar aspirational plots.



A screenshot from BitChute showing CBRN-related material from the prepper scene. (Credit withheld)

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A 2008 US report, *Homeland Security Threat Assessment: Evaluating Threats 2008-2013*, declared, "The IC [intelligence community], law enforcement, and open source reporting have identified activities that indicate intent by right-wing extremists to commit violent attacks using explosive or biological or chemical agents that could result in mass casualties." In its intelligence assessment of 14 October 2008 (Domestic Terrorists' Intent and Capability to Use Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear Weapons), the FBI's Weapons of Mass Destruction Directorate also recognised preparations for CBRN weapons use at an early stage, not only by declared US right-wing extremists such as Demetrius Crocker (jailed in April 2006 for plotting to detonate an improvised explosive device to release sarin), but also by actors such as Michael Alan Crooker (who was described in the report as an "antigovernment extremist" and pleaded guilty in 2011 to one count of possession of ricin), William Krar (who pleaded guilty to building and possessing chemical weapons in 2004), or Denys Ray Hughes (convicted in 2006 for attempted production of a toxin).

This group of individuals overlaps with that of the Sovereign Citizens; the equivalents in Germany and Austria are known as Reichsbürger, and are counted among the right-wing extremist scene.

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(664 of 3240 words)

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