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U.S. domestic 'extremists' or 'terrorists'?



By [Dzul kifli Abdul Razak](#) - February 3, 2021 @ 12:00am



In this file photo former US President Donald Trump leaves after speaking during a "Make America Great Again" rally at Total Sports Park November 1, 2020, in Washington. - AFP pic

With the impeachment gathering momentum, Donald Trump is back in the limelight.

This time with the shocking details of the said Capitol "insurrection" that the former POTUS allegedly incited as a domestic terror, according to some.

Others deemed this to be equivalent, if not more dangerous, to that which made the United States "terrorist" list. How it missed the list is a matter of conjecture that we will come back to.

But for now, the US mainstream media billed it as domestic "extremists" rather "terrorists". At times, even more tamely, as rioters, mobs and the like.

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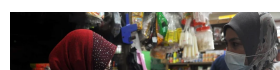
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Mostly being white is one explanation giving credence to the other conspiracy theory of somewhat legitimising the white supremacy groups within the US historical legacy. Even a group like the Klu Klux Klan (KKK) is allegedly not referred to as a "terrorist" organisation despite its wide-ranging infamous "terror" tactics used against Blacks and people of colour.

If the KKK does not qualify, then one wonders which one would if not coloured groups like the Black Panthers, for example.

One description of the latter highlighted how its members were "dressed in commando gear, carried weapons, and talked about killing 'pigs'". An observation was made that their "public embrace of violence frightened many whites".

Yet some historians did indicate that the group which stormed the Capitol on Jan 6 was not isolated in world history.

According to Alexander Ross, a professor who studied far-right movements in Portland State University, the mobbing of the US Capitol drew parallels between an uprising in the 1920s in Germany by military irregulars, who dislodged the Weimar government for four days before collapsing. Although the attempt failed, it gave the notorious Adolf Hitler a national audience.

"I don't know if it will be clear to many how close the US had come today to complete disintegration of the constitutional system, but we came close," Ross was quoted as saying.

"And we aren't out of the woods yet."

That such protests happened at statehouses across the US signals how deeply conspiracy theory has spread, at least among far-right groups. The groups have reportedly stormed statehouses twice before, last spring and summer. Therefore, it should not come as a surprise as to their goals and capability.

In fact, in a tape released recently, Trump was urging his followers to go home while implying that there would be future chances to win the election, which he deemed was stolen from him.

Adding on to this, a more direct comparison by Justin Ward argued that "white terror" is not new in the history of the US.

Except that it is generally left unsaid. According to him, for a century following the end of the Civil War, white terror was a constant fixture in American life. More than 4,000 documented lynching occurred during the period.

Mass racist violence targeting Black and indigenous people, as well as

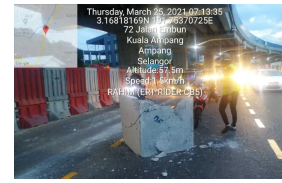


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various immigrant groups, occurred about once annually on average.

At the height of the violence, more than 30 anti-Black riots broke out across the country during the Red Summer 1919. This carnage, if covered at all, was treated as a mere footnote in the grand narrative about the national destiny of a country.

Ward also contended that history text books "oversimplify the causes of racial violence in that era". Race hatred was "a tool of business interests", which used Black workers almost exclusively as strikebreaker – a role

that they were relegated to by the stubborn refusal of white-dominated unions to organise them.

"Texts often validate rather than challenge the contemporary white supremacist view of anti-Black riots, highlighting incidents that originate in (often false) allegations of sexual assaults by Black men against white women," he noted.

Under the circumstances, it would be interesting to see if the use of "extremists" will continue to be validated. Or will the term "terrorists" be put to appropriate use, especially when terrorism seems to benefit white supremacy in the US-styled democracy.

As correctly pointed out by Ward, Trump and his crude, garish displays of patriotism are only effective because the public has been conditioned to respond to them. It is not for nothing that US has long cultivated the ideology needed to sustain itself as a global empire, albeit tainted by racism.

From that perspective, Trumpism is not an aberration, but rather, the next logical step in the (d)evolution of Americanism. With or without the impeachment.

The writer, an NST columnist for more than 20 years, is International Islamic University Malaysia rector

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