



# NCITE

NATIONAL COUNTERTERRORISM,  
INNOVATION, TECHNOLOGY,  
AND EDUCATION CENTER

A U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY CENTER OF EXCELLENCE

## New Center Called to Combat Terrorism

I was 16 when our school van pulled up to the scene of a terrorist attack.

The air was still acrid that muggy April day in 1995, five days after a man with a beef and a bomb had driven into the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City and blown it apart. Timothy McVeigh had shattered lives and a sense of safety. Exposed beams and wires jutted out of the gaping building remains. The ground appeared covered in snow.

Fear and violence are powerful motivators.

They strike at our basic animal instinct. The threat of loss - of life, limb, liberty, love - eclipses everything else. Fear shapes the behavior of people, communities, and governments. Though I became one, it doesn't take a psychologist to determine that fear, when stoked by violence, is so cannily, sadly effective. It's why bullies and despots use it. It's why the powerless justify it. Fear is the province of extremists for a reason: Coercion through force and fear can be equalizers. The root word of terrorism, after all, is a synonym for fear.

We are in a period of fear. A raging pandemic with no cure or vaccine in sight has upended daily life around the world. Partisan and ideological differences have torn at an already-frayed social fabric. Longstanding, unresolved issues are at the fore. Already, those with a violent, ideological bend are taking advantage of the uncertainty and unrest. Experts are warning that conditions are ripe for terrorism.

This makes the timing of the NCITE Center all too relevant. The National Counterterrorism, Innovation, Technology, and Education Center is the federal government's latest tool in the fight against fear and violence. This academic research hub harnesses the nation's intellectual firepower to gain insight into the problem of terrorism and into ways to thwart it. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security has entrusted NCITE with 10 years of funding to study and apply anti-terrorism and terrorism prevention remedies. NCITE means insight and insight means vision. Vision is what we need to counteract the darkness of fear and violence.

The NCITE Center coordinates the work of 18 universities, 50-plus researchers, and 10 projects centered around various terrorism questions. We are solutions-oriented. We are user-inspired. We are mission-oriented. Driving us is the belief that what counters terror is knowledge about the problem, research into the solution, and action toward the implementation. We seek to translate our findings into better training and concrete tools for our Homeland Security frontline.

We have outlined projects that look at how terrorists think and plan, how they use social media, how people start on a terrorist pathway and how they can change. We will study counterterrorism and terrorism prevention. We will build education and career paths to strengthen the next generation of Homeland Security workers. This future workforce will need to navigate STEM and social science fields, adapting quickly and thinking creatively.

It is a scary time to be sure. But history is full of stories of fear. And courage.

Back in 1995, my high school history teacher took a small group from our little town of Weatherford, Oklahoma, to a History Day competition in our capital city. She had wanted to make sure that we saw the pointless, destructive end of ideological violence. That event had killed 168 people, 19 of them babies and children. It had shattered any sense of security we had. I remember as our van pulled up how massive the scale was. TV just couldn't capture the scope.

I don't remember if we cried or prayed or reacted. I do remember we had to stay close, not wander. I do remember that what looked like snow was actually dust and paper. Pieces and pieces of paper, some blasted so close to us we could read it. Words in cursive. The paper represented the machinery of government that the bomber and domestic terrorist McVeigh so hated. It was this simple artifact of a system and place and bureaucracy teeming that had, until that moment, teemed with life.

The next Timothy McVeigh is out here, I fear. He might be an-out-of-work construction worker, angry at his government for not helping him find a job during Covid-19. He might be an airport baggage handler, upset he didn't get that promotion. He might be in prison awaiting his release and unsure what support he will have once he's out. She might be reading online posts from overseas encouraging her to take action here, where she can.

The next Timothy McVeighs could be from anywhere, hold any extreme ideology, have any motivation.

NCITE's job is to figure out how to stop them.