



LEGAL AND POLITICAL PERSPECTIVES IN COUNTERING ECO-TERRORISM: CASE OF THE ANIMAL LIBERATION FRONT

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The purpose of this article is to examine the radical ecological movement, particularly focusing on its extremist and potentially violent activities, using the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) as a case study. This article aims to highlight how radical ecological movements pose significant threats to both national and international security. It explores the philosophical underpinnings of such movements, their methods of operation, and the broader implications for environmental and human safety.

Methods: A qualitative method was employed for this study, which relies on articles from scientific periodicals selected on the basis of keywords such as "environmental radicalism," "environmental extremism," "ecoterrorism," and "Animal Liberation Front."

Results: The ideological and philosophical foundations of radicalism and extremism in the public-environmental movement "Animal Liberation Front" were identified, including deep social ecology, bioregionalism, and neo-Luddism. The study also presents the methods and forms of extremist activity of this organization.

Conclusion: The authors conclude that increased attention and preventive measures are necessary to monitor and neutralize potential dangers posed by these radical groups, ensuring both environmental and human safety. It is crucial to eliminate the





ideological roots of ecoterrorism and develop strategies to counter the growing threat of radical environmentalism.

Keywords: Environmental radicalism, Environmental extremism, Ecoterrorism, Animal liberation front, Deep ecology.

INTRODUCTION

In Western countries, the critique of consumer society, which is responsible for the growing environmental crisis, began in the late 1950s and 1960s (Markhayeva et al., 2023). The first environmental movements appeared, inspired mainly by the ideas of the American counterculture of the 1960s, whose radical critique of consumer society reached the very foundations of this society (and even the foundations of Western industrial civilization), such as the market, the pursuit of profit, the cult of individual material success, and hedonism, encouraging ever more consumption and saturation with sensual pleasures (Yang et al., 2018; Abdullaev et al., 2020). These movements are often characterized by social radicalism and anticapitalist rhetoric (Abdullaev et al., 2021; Petrovskaya, 2023). Their critique focused primarily on the economies and consumer societies of the West and, later, on political power as a political emanation of this system (Johnston&Johnston, 2014; Serbina, 2023). The activities of these movements undoubtedly produced valuable results in popularizing pro-environmental ideas and views, contributing to significant improvements in the state of the environment in Western societies (Sarsekova et al., 2023). Many of their demands were supported by political groups belonging to the establishment criticized by these environmental movements, which contributed to the implementation of pro-environmental legal solutions (Posłuszna, 2020; Ydyrys, 2023). Environmental movements in the West emerged as protest movements against the destruction of human habitats and as social pressure movements for their protection (Spadaro, 2020).

Organizations and movements that prioritized violent tools directed at groups and individuals perceived as threatening the natural environment became the extreme manifestation of the radical ecological trend (Alekseev et al., 2022; Rednikova, 2023). The concept of pro-environmental attitudes on a "behavioral level" and active actions was understood by the leaders of radical environmental movements as legally permitted activities (picketing, demonstrations, and counterdemonstrations), as well as





a whole range of illegal and even criminal actions, including acts of criminally punishable terrorism (Carson et al., 2013).

Linking the idea of environmental protection with the activities of extremist pro-environmental movements inevitably leads to the identification of a specific category of radical ecological thought, which in practice boils down to one of the varieties of modern terrorist threats—ecoterrorism.

The extremist activities of fringe groups, organizations, and public movements representing radical views of environmentalists and animal rights activists, which emerged in the second half of the 20th century in the USA, Australia, and some Western European countries, are classified by researchers as a typology of single-issue terrorism (Joosse, 2012) or millenarian terrorism (Vanderheiden, 2005). In a narrower sense, the extremist activities of animal rights activists are called "animalistic terrorism," and the activities of environmentalists are called "environmental terrorism" (Loadenthal, 2013).

Attempting to define the phenomenon of ecoterrorism is not simple. In seeking the origins of "ecoterrorism" as a specific conceptual category, researchers conclude that the term "ecoterrorism" was invented by the antienvironmental activist Ron Arnold, who understood ecoterrorism as a crime committed in the name of saving nature (Schlembach, 2018). The difficulties in describing the phenomenon of ecoterrorism arise from placing it within the spectrum of complex and dynamic phenomena such as terrorism and its various often subjective typologies.

According to some researchers, the core concept of ecoterrorism is bioterrorism, which is defined as the direct or intentional harmful use of a biological agent against humans or ecosystems whose properties are characterized by a high degree of pathogenicity, virulence, and expansive spread, while having a low detection and identification threshold and low production costs (Telford, 2020). The tool of bioterrorists is the criminal use of bacteria, viruses, rickettsiae, fungi, and various types of materials and toxins derived from them. Examples from history include anthrax, botulism, plague, Ebola virus, Marburg virus, and smallpox (Buell, 2009; Kuderina et al., 2021).

Analyzing attempts to define ecoterrorism allows for some general conclusions on which ecoterrorism can be understood as follows:

- Conscious activity of extremist and radical public movements engaging in various activities related to environmental protection and animal rights—using various legal





and illegal tools, including violence—to ensure the enforcement of specific systemic solutions as well as specific behavior by both government management and private individuals (Smith, 2008);

- Conscious triggering of epidemics, environmental catastrophes using biological agents, or deliberate large-scale ecosystem pollution to force governments to adopt specific political decisions or implement ideological concepts (Smith, 2008).

Researchers studying the relationship between humans and the environment describe the phenomenon of ecoterrorism in two categories:

- Instrumental ecoterrorism (environmental blackmail) — when radical violent methods of action have no connection to the implementation of ecological ideas, and they are merely a justification for the true intentions of criminals. The target of the attack is the ecosystem and the potential catastrophic consequences of such an attack (e.g., bioterrorist attack, destruction of a nuclear power plant, dam of a hydroelectric power station, water pollution, oil rig arson, etc.) (Bondaroff, 2008);
- Millenarian ecoterrorism — where the extremism of action forms is a result of ideological inspiration and where the primary targets of the attacks are people (Loadenthal, 2017).

Thus, ecoterrorism is an illegal radical method used by environmentalists aimed at pressuring governments and industrialists to achieve specific political goals (Bekezhanov et al., 2021). According to experts, the path from ecoterrorism to bioterrorism, the use of biological weapons, the poisoning of water supplies, or the use of toxic gases to achieve specific government decisions, is very short (Sumner&Weidman, 2013). Since extremist environmental and animal protection organizations have developed primarily in the USA, it is worth providing the definition of ecoterrorism developed by FBI analysts, according to which ecoterrorism is the use or threat of using criminal violence against people or property by environmentally oriented groups for ecological and political purposes, often of a symbolic nature (Sorenson, 2011).

The development of Islamic terrorism has led to the fact that since 2011, no specific research on the issues of environmental radicalism and extremism has been conducted, and necessary preventive measures have not been taken. However, as FBI reports show, the constantly increasing threats of ecoterrorism require active



prevention and very thorough research, analysis, and monitoring of the phenomenon of ecocentric ideology (Smith, 2008;).

On this basis, the aim of this article is to present radical ecological thought that poses a threat to security at both the local and international levels. The Animal Liberation Front was chosen as a representative organization of environmental extremism, which, through the prism of its slogans and methods of operation, is perceived as one of the main groups associated with ecoterrorism.

According to the aim of the research, the objectives of this study are as follows:

- To analyze the ideological and philosophical foundations of radicalism and extremism within public environmental movements, with a specific focus on the animal liberation front (ALF).
- To examine the methods and forms of extremist activities employed by the ALF and their implications for national and public security.
- To assess the potential evolution of such movements into more severe forms of terrorism, including ecoterrorism, preventive measures to monitor and mitigate these threats should be proposed.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In accordance with the peculiarities of analyzing radicalism and extremism in public environmental movements, a qualitative approach was chosen for the study. Data were collected during the period from November 30, 2023, to March 30, 2024, by analyzing scientific literature on the research problem.

In the first stage of the research, sources of information necessary to achieve the research goal were selected. The data for this study are represented by articles and reviews published in journals indexed in Scopus and Web of Science. The information search was conducted via the keywords "environmental radicalism," "environmental extremism," "ecoterrorism," "Animal Liberation Front," and "ALF" in both English and Russian titles, abstracts, and keywords.

In the second stage of the research, on the basis of the analysis of the source, the ideological and philosophical foundations of radicalism and extremism in the public-environmental movement of the Animal Liberation Front, as well as the methods and forms of extremist activity of the Animal Liberation Front as one of the main groups associated with ecoterrorism, were identified.





RESULTS

Researchers note that there are groups in the world that, under the guise of caring for the environment, call for armed struggle and, not finding partners for dialog, resort to direct action [20]. For a certain period, their activities included freeing animals from breeding farms, throwing paint on people wearing fur, and arson and ramming whaling ships. However, over time, the sentiments of the "eco-activists" became so radical that the FBI took an interest in ecoterrorism, concluding that environmental radicalism posed a significant threat to the security of the United States (Flükiger, 2009).

In March 2001, six months before the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the FBI recognized the extremist environmental movement "Earth Liberation Front" as the most dangerous domestic terrorist group, and by 2005, the phenomenon of ecoterrorism was acknowledged as the greatest internal threat to the United States (Cherry, 2010).

According to research, the extremist activities of animal rights movement participants developed almost in parallel with eco-terrorist groups under the banner of environmental protection, but their cradle was in the United Kingdom, and they later spread to the USA and other Western European countries (Cooke, 2013). In 1962, John Prestige founded the first radical animal rights movement in Brixham—the Hunt Saboteurs Association (HSA), which used sabotage as a means of direct action to disrupt hunting activities. Over time, the HSA has radicalized its methods, escalating to the destruction of hunters' vehicles, scientific laboratories, buildings, arson, and even attacks weapon manufacturers, breeders of slaughter and laboratory animals (Fernandez, 2020). The extremist activities of HSA members were investigated by British police, leading to numerous arrests during sabotage operations.

After one such arrest and a three-year prison sentence, the HSA member Ronnie Lee founded the most famous animal rights group in 1976—the Animal Liberation Front (ALF). Over time, ALF members opened branches in the USA and Canada. During its years of operation, ALF conducted hundreds of direct actions targeting hunters, farmers, zoos, circuses, representatives of the fur industry, pharmaceutical industry, and scientific community (Liddick, 2013). From 1979 to 1993, ALF attacked 63 academic institutions and 21 private research laboratories in the USA,



causing damage amounting to over \$6.5 million USD, as did 76 agrofood enterprises, where losses amounted to over \$1.1 million USD (Loadenthal, 2010).

The discussion among researchers surrounding direct action and ALF often focuses on the use of violence. ALF activists claim that they do not use violence, referring to a narrow definition of violence applicable only to humans and animals (Sorenson, 2011). However, researchers believe that the destruction of a person's property, such as the arson of a slaughterhouse, should also be considered a form of violence (Munro, 2005).

An analysis of the scientific literature allowed the identification of the ideological and philosophical foundations of radicalism and extremism in the ALF (Table 1).

Table 1. Ideological and Philosophical Foundations of Radicalism and Extremism in the Public–Environmental Movement "Animal Liberation Front"

| Nº | Ideological Foundations | Main Provisions | Key Representatives |
|----|-------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| 1 | Deep Ecology | Rejection of the anthropocentric model of the world; adoption of a biocentric model of the world with necessary changes to basic economic, technological, and ideological structures; creation of a classless, decentralized society based on small autonomous communities with a simple lifestyle and minimal impact on nature | Arne Næss, George Sessions, Bill Devall |
| 2 | Social Ecology | Decentralization of social and economic relations to ensure the creation of new forms of communities, production, and "appropriate technologies" (small, renewable, and stable energy sources) that are more modest in scale and have lower resource needs | Murray Bookchin |
| 3 | Bioregionalism | Stable, self-sufficient, and ecologically sustainable living in small communities formed in harmony with the natural environment of the ecological region in which they are located | Jim Dodge, Peter K. List |
| 4 | Neo-Luddism | Slowing down or stopping the development of new technologies; rejection of all modern technologies (electromagnetic, chemical, nuclear, genetic); love and adoration of nature; punishment of those responsible for the current situation (scientists, corporate leaders, politicians, etc.) | Chellis Glendinning |

Source: Compiled by the author on the analysis of sources

DISCUSSION

The analysis of the literature shows that the main goal of the ALF (Animal Liberation Front) is the liberation of animals from the "yoke" of human oppression,



which aligns it with the ideological foundations of deep philosophy. From its inception, this organization has been characterized as an "underground organization" because it decided to use means and methods that are incompatible with international law to achieve its goals. Their objective was to inflict significant material damage on enterprises exploiting animals, making their activities financially unviable. The actions had to be decisive enough so that companies exploiting animals would feel threatened and unable to operate optimally (Cherry, 2010). The ALF representatives described their methods as "nonviolent direct action," which is closely related to the ideas of neo-Luddism.

In the 1980s, ALF activities were mainly directed against laboratories conducting animal testing for food and pharmaceutical companies. However, over time, they expanded their scope of activity. Animal rights activists have used various methods of struggle, ranging from protest actions involving the placement of corresponding inscriptions on the walls or cages of zootechnical laboratories, applying aerosol paint, or tying themselves to trees intended for cutting down in areas that constitute the habitat of animals, to acts of sabotage, including the arson of animal testing facilities, freeing animals from cages, destroying residential houses built in territories belonging to protected species of animals, and so on. In only a few cases were the police and other services able to arrest the perpetrators of arson and other particularly brutal sabotage actions (Liddick, 2013).

To implement their ideology, radical environmental organizations resort to means such as arson, bombings, special booby-trapped parcels with infectious material of deadly diseases sent to owners of breeding enterprises, meat processing plants, fur factories, and so on.

In the mid-1990s, the UK was shaken by a wave of attacks on farmers, meat processing plants, and restaurateurs. In shops selling furs, people wearing furs were set on fire, and explosions were carried out. It is estimated that the radical ALF, particularly its subsidiary organization called the Animal Liberation Militia (ALM), became the most serious threat to the residents of England after IRA terrorism (Schlembach, 2018).

In 1982, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher received two packages with unexploded bombs. In the same year, British media claimed that the Animal Liberation Militia had poisoned Mars bars in grocery stores to force the company producing this





product to stop testing it on monkeys. The action turned out to be a hoax, but the company lost \$4.5 million [9].

In 2000, the Russian branch of ALF carried out attacks on fur shops and meat processing plants in Moscow, Sochi, and Krasnodar. Moreover, that same year in Moscow, the buildings of the Medical Academy were broken into, from which 119 frogs, 110 rats, and 5 rabbits used for medical experiments were released (Munro, 2005).

Over the past twenty years, there have been changes in the methods used by eco-extremists, which are largely related to the evolution of extremism itself, the ideological context, and the motivation of criminals (Postulszna, 2020).

The basis of the ideology of radical animal rights activists is biocentrism. They believe that the lives of animals are just as valuable as human lives are; therefore, they must be protected from any harm caused by humans (Rednikova, 2023). Radical animal rights activists primarily oppose animal experiments and industrial-scale breeding. The main targets of eco-extreme attacks are laboratories (medical, veterinary, university, or private enterprises) where animal experiments are conducted. The offices and factories of companies benefiting from the results of such research are also attacked. Radical animal rights activists also do not shy away from attacking places of production and trade in food products, from slaughterhouses and industrial farms to fast-food outlets.

Vandalism remains the most popular method of eco-extremism, which involves graffiti, window breaking, or taping the doors of targeted objects. Arson and sabotage are equally popular. Both methods allow significant damage to be inflicted at relatively low costs. A very simple and effective method is to warn people about alleged food poisoning for the purpose of sabotage. The need to recall entire batches of food products from the market leads to enormous financial and reputational losses for both producers and sellers of sabotaged goods. Another characteristic method used by animal rights activists is the release of laboratory animals into the wild. Their main victims are scientists conducting animal experiments. They receive threatening emails and expressions of hatred, their homes are vandalized with graffiti, and derogatory leaflets are distributed in schools attended by their children. There is also a precedent where animal rights activists planted incendiary bombs in shopping centers in the UK and the USA (Smith, 2008).

Experts note how horrifying the actions of ALF can be, including their propaganda efforts. For example, in January 1977, three activists of this organization





broke into a crypt to describe the grave of Robert Peel, the legendary hunter and twice Prime Minister of the UK. After breaking the tomb and digging up the grave, ALF members threw a fox effigy into it (Bondaroff, 2008).

According to the experts, there has been a gradual shift within eco-extremist circles from the ideology being preached to the application of increasingly radical measures to implement it: initially, in the name of protecting "animal rights," the idea of vegetarianism was advocated; companies involved in breeding animals for slaughter were picketed; and trade in fur products was contested. However, later, the time came for direct actions, including the destruction of objects and the violent release of animals from breeding farms, laboratories, etc.

The FBI predicted that an organization such as ALF could become one of the most active extremist groups in the USA. One of the founders of the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals publicly stated that "arson, destruction of property, robbery, and theft are permissible crimes if they are committed for reasons related to animals (Carson et al., 2012).

The ease with which various extremist movements and organizations can spread their ideas in the 21st century makes it necessary to seriously consider new ways to counter these processes, especially since knowledge about the possibilities of effectively countering their activities raises extreme distrust of existing strategies to combat these phenomena (Alekseev et al., 2022). In light of the changes that the strategies of various extremist movements and organizations have undergone during the information and communication revolution at the turn of the century, it is difficult to believe in the possibility of maintaining the existing balance of power in the fight against them. The development of new, inexpensive information and communication tools makes life easier for extremists and certainly complicates life for everyone responsible for countering environmental radicalism and extremism (Bekezhanov et al., 2022).

This also forces us to think about new ways to counter these alarming trends. The nature of new extremism in the information and communication era raises the suspicion that, in the future, actions in areas where the digital transformation of society has begun to change most quickly and intensely will play a much more important role in combating it (Sorenson, 2011).

To conclude, the findings of this study underscore the significant threat posed by radical environmental movements such as the animal liberation front (ALF) to both national and public security. While these groups may begin with legitimate





environmental concerns, their methods and ideologies often escalate into forms of extremism that endanger both human and environmental safety. In light of these challenges, considering a series of actionable steps that can be taken to mitigate these risks and promote a more balanced approach to environmental advocacy is crucial.

- **Strengthening Monitoring Mechanisms:** Enhancing surveillance and intelligence-gathering efforts to closely monitor the activities of radical environmental groups, particularly those with a history of extremist actions.
- **Implement Preventive Legal Measures:** Develop and enforce stricter laws and regulations that specifically address ecoterrorism and related activities, ensuring that law enforcement agencies have the legal tools necessary to intervene before violent actions occur.
- **Promote Public Awareness:** Launch public awareness campaigns to educate communities about the potential dangers of radical environmental movements.
- **Support Research and Education:** Investing in academic research and educational programs focused on understanding the root causes of environmental extremism and developing effective counterextremism strategies.

CONCLUSION

Thus, the activities of environmental radicals and extremists are not always aimed at protecting the environment and, therefore, do not always serve to ensure environmental security. The sources of threats and their consequences are not always recognizable, but they can undoubtedly have negative impacts, felt both by the international community and by the citizens of individual countries, thereby posing a threat to the internal security of any state.

Compared with the potential and resources of, for example, Islamic terrorism, the activities of radical environmental organizations may seem somewhat eccentric. However, considering the methods used by terrorists, it cannot be definitively stated that the next attack on a strategically important object or region will not be the work of eco-terrorist activists. The current involvement of international forces in the fight against Islamic terrorism creates a void that can be filled by other radical and extremist organizations, including those with an environmental focus, which may pose a threat to national security. Therefore, the radical environmental movement represents a significant threat to national security and contradicts the harmonious development of the natural environment and human society.





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