

Op-Ed

Submitted by the

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FOUR WAYS TO PREVENT ANOTHER TIMOTHY McVEIGH

HOW TO REDUCE THE LIKELIHOOD OF DOMESTIC TERRORISM

BY STEVE DASBACH (699 WORDS)

Will Timothy McVeigh return from the dead?

The Oklahoma City bomber is dead, of course, executed by lethal injection. But will *another* Timothy McVeigh — another remorseless killer with a hatred of the federal government — emerge to continue his campaign of terror?

There's no way to know. But there is a way to reduce the odds that another disgruntled nonentity will be able to work himself into a killing rage and commit a similar act of senseless violence.

In fact, here are four specific steps the government could take to reduce the chances that a Timothy McVeigh-style domestic terrorist will strike again:

(1) Prosecute government officials who commit crimes.

McVeigh said he blew up the building in Oklahoma City to protest the federal government's actions in Waco. Whatever his reasons, he was quickly apprehended, tried, and punished for his crime. Justice was served, even if you might disagree with the morality of the death sentence.

However, not a single FBI or BATF agent was arrested for their role in the fiery deaths of 86 people at the Branch Davidian compound. That's not right. There should not be one standard of justice for ordinary Americans and another for government officials. Until that injustice is eliminated, many Americans will continue to view their government with suspicion, fear, and bitterness.

(2) Reject violence on principle.

Over the past 20 years, the U.S. government has intervened militarily in Iraq, Yugoslavia, Haiti, Panama, Afghanistan, Bosnia, Kosovo, and other nations. In each case, these military actions were done without the benefit of a formal declaration of war, and resulted in innocent civilians being killed.

The message of these actions is clear: It's proper to use violence to achieve political goals. But that's a message the government should *not* send. Instead, a commitment to

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nonviolence should start at the top.

Unless the security of our nation is directly threatened, the U.S. government should not bomb, invade, or attack other nations. Violence breeds violence. It's time for our government to lead by example — and stop the bloodshed.

(3) Embrace an open, vibrant political system.

People tend to turn to violence only when they feel they have no other way to be heard. It is the government's responsibility, then, to make sure that political discussion is not restricted, regulated, or suppressed.

When Americans feel they have a voice in the political system, they will work through that system to make positive changes. When that avenue is blocked — either by restrictive ballot access laws, legal curbs on political speech, or by attempts to discredit unpopular opinions — the Timothy McVeighs of the world turn to violence.

That's why robust political debate — especially about the proper limits of government power — is healthy for America. And that's why stifling such debate is downright dangerous.

(4) Reduce the size and power of the federal government.

No sensible person would maintain that the federal government's growing power justifies what Timothy McVeigh did. But the fact is, millions of Americans view their government with apprehension.

Americans see a government that can recklessly seize our property under asset forfeiture, eminent domain, or environmental laws; that can detain us at roadblocks for not wearing a seatbelt; that forces banks to spy on their own customers; that shoots innocent people dead in the name of the War on Drugs; that can secretly read our e-mail; and that can violate our civil liberties in a thousand different ways.

A government that was limited to its Constitutionally defined role would be less threatening. It would be a government that honors fundamental American liberties, instead of undermining them. And it would be a government that gives Americans little reason to view it with trepidation.

If implemented, these four suggestions would change the political climate in a positive way — and make sure that the spirit of Timothy McVeigh stays dead and buried in his grave.

No, we can never bring back the men, women, and children who were killed in Oklahoma City. But by using this tragedy to reaffirm our nation's fundamental liberties, we can help make sure that the 168 people who died in Oklahoma City did not die in vain.

It could be America's way of saying: "Never again."

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NOTE: A photo of Mr. Dasbach and an electronic version of this essay are available.
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