

# SHADOW PROOF

## **Mail-Bomb Scare: Why It's Loathsome To Argue 'Both Sides' Are Responsible**

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Several politicians in the United States reacted to news of a mail-bomb scare by accusing “both sides” of the political spectrum of violence and harassment that has made the climate “divisive.” But “both sides” are not fanning the flames of reactionary politics.

Only President Donald Trump manufactures, fuels, and encourages fantasies or delusions of his far-right base, cheering violence as he denounces enemies. That kind of rhetoric from one of the most powerful people in the world incites supporters.

At the moment, Bill and Hillary Clinton, Barack and Michelle Obama, Joe Biden, Eric Holder, Maxine Waters, and George Soros received suspicious packages. CNN received a suspicious package that was intended for John Brennan, a contributor.

The day that suspected explosive devices were found in envelopes, Democratic New York Governor Andrew Cuomo appeared on CNN and pushed the notion that “both sides” deserved blame in truly loathsome fashion.

Initially, Cuomo’s office was asked if they received any suspicious packages. The office said “no,” but shortly after, Cuomo announced to the press that a suspicious package was received. The FBI indicated a few hours later this was not true. Cuomo did not receive anything resembling a bomb.

What Cuomo received was some literature from someone angry about the presence of the white supremacist group, the Proud Boys. Information was sent to Cuomo’s office to communicate why the Proud Boys pose a threat to the community.

Cuomo opportunistically stated, “My office received a package, which turned out to be the exact opposite. It was a person who was irate at the right.”

“The Republicans in New York invited a group called the Proud Boys last week. The Proud Boys—and I hate to even give them publicity—they’re a hate group. They call themselves Western chauvinists. They’re white supremacists, and they had a forum in New York.”

“There was violence afterwards. Many people were offended by their presence, and the package my office received was information on the Proud Boys.”

Cuomo added, “So you actually have, on one day, both sides aggravated, angry, hostile, hateful to the other, and that’s where we have gotten as a nation, and that, my friend, is more sobering than anything else.”

CNN anchor Wolf Blitzer immediately recognized the problem with what Cuomo said. “Governor, the package that you guys got in your office in New York City included hateful material, but certainly was not similar to a bomb, which we saw at these other locations in New York and Westchester, here in Washington as well.”

Someone who sends literature that is “hateful” because they want to make sure a public official is aware of the contents is not equal or similar to someone mailing crude explosives to politicians and former officials. However, Cuomo did not back away from what he said.

“My point is, Wolf, of course, a bomb is more dangerous than sending a package of negative material. But the point is, you are at that point of political volatility, where we now have political terrorism, where our dialogue, our discussion, our debate has gotten so ugly, so mean, so fierce that both sides are enraged,” Cuomo insisted.

It is hard to tell whether he was truly bewildered or deliberately misread the moment to make an empty centrist plea for decency. Yet, it is astonishing that Cuomo could have used the presence of the Proud Boys as another example of the violence whipped up by the far-right to argue the mailed bombs were not an anomaly.

Cuomo further demonstrated his ineptitude. “This is political terrorism. This would be, if it turns out, political terrorism, left or right, Democrat or Republican. But this takes us to a new chapter, and frankly, in some ways, a more frightening chapter because it is internal to the United States.”

“What it’s saying is, we have gotten so vitriolic, so angry, so hate-filled, that our politics has actually gotten to the point where we’re looking to harm one another.”

Such an assessment is stunningly ignorant. Political terrorism has been waged by members of the Ku Klux Klan and other white supremacist groups against African Americans for decades.

Right-wing terrorism is a rising threat. As the New York Times detailed in 2015:

Last year, for example, a man who identified with the sovereign citizen movement — which claims not to recognize the authority of federal or local government — attacked a courthouse in Forsyth County, Ga., firing an assault rifle at police officers and trying to cover his approach with tear gas and smoke grenades. The suspect was killed by the police, who returned fire. In Nevada, anti-government militants reportedly walked up to and shot two police officers at a restaurant, then placed a “Don’t tread on me” flag on their bodies. An anti-government extremist in Pennsylvania was arrested on suspicion of shooting two state troopers, killing one of them, before leading authorities on a 48-day manhunt. A right-wing militant in Texas declared a “revolution” and was arrested on suspicion of attempting to rob an armored car in order to buy weapons and explosives and attack law enforcement. These individuals on the fringes of right-wing politics increasingly worry law enforcement officials.

Since 2000, two dozen law enforcement officers were killed by right-wing extremists, who shared a “fear that government will confiscate firearms” and a “belief in the approaching collapse of government and the economy.”

There is no equal left-wing terrorism threat. Alex Nowrasteh of the libertarian Cato Institute calculated, “Terrorists inspired by nationalist and right-wing ideology have killed about 10 times as many people as left-wing terrorists since 1992.”

Quartz reported, “An analysis of the Global Terrorism Database by researchers at the University of Maryland published in 2017 shows a ‘sharp increase’ in the share of attacks by right-wing extremists, from six percent in the 2000s to 35 percent in the 2010s.”

“The share of attacks by religious extremists also increased, from nine percent to 53 percent between the two decades. Meanwhile, the share of attacks by left-wing terrorists and environmentalist extremists dropped from 64 percent in the 2000s to 12 percent in the 2010s.”

Still, Democratic Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, who has displayed a weak appetite for taking action to meaningfully frustrate Trump’s destructive agenda, tweeted, “Make no mistake: Despicable acts of violence and harassment are being carried out by radicals across the political spectrum—not just by one side.”

Republican Senator Jeff Flake, who has perfected the art of pretending to oppose Trump to burnish one’s political reputation, declared, “The overheated rhetoric has gone too far. We’ve seen it for [the past] couple of years. Those of us who were on that ball field where somebody had the list of Republicans in his pocket that he wanted to target. We’re seeing it here where people on the other side of the spectrum are being targeted. We’ve seen it on all sides and everyone needs to cool it down.”

Flake referred, like other Republicans, to the shooting in June 2017 at the annual Congressional Baseball Game for Charity that injured Republican Representative Steve Scalise. The perpetrator was angry at Trump and had a list of Republican lawmakers he planned to target. He had volunteered for Senator Bernie Sanders’ presidential campaign.

Yet, there is a key difference. No one in positions of power encourages left-wing terrorism or violence by progressive voters. The same cannot be said for Trump and Republicans.

That has not prevented the Democratic Party and liberal media establishment from seizing upon this idea that Sanders supporters can be violent, too.

When the shooting occurred, the New York Times highlighted what they described as the “belligerent reputation for their criticism of Hillary Clinton, the Democratic Party, and others who they believed disagreed with their ideas.”

“Sanders fans, sometimes referred to derogatorily as ‘Bernie Bros’ or ‘Bernie Bots,’ at times harassed reporters covering Mr. Sanders and flooded social media with angry posts directed at the ‘corporate media,’ a term often used by the senator,” reporter Yamiche Alcindor added.

The language in the report was symptomatic of how Cuomo, Schumer, and media organizations manipulate calls for civility to control dissent. Angry protest, particularly confrontations with politicians or government officials in public, is inappropriately treated as violent. Criticism is regarded as “belligerent,” when rancorous disagreement should be encouraged in any supposed democracy.

It remains unknown who sent the mail-bombs, but let’s contemplate two possible scenarios.

One is that the person who mailed the devices is an avid consumer of right-wing media, especially on the internet. He may believe Brennan and the other targets are part of a deep state conspiracy to take down Trump. The bombs were sent to assassinate individuals to stop this conspiracy or make them afraid to continue this conspiracy. There apparently was a spoof ISIS flag—a well-known right-wing meme—on the device mailed to Brennan.

Another scenario is that someone is impersonating a right-wing Trump supporter in order to stir chaos. It could be from the left. It could be a provocateur with no political aims. The media does not know. That reality should lead to restraint when pundits speculate, as the Rolling Stone's Matt Taibbi encouraged.

Yet, regardless of the political beliefs of the person who sent the package, there is no “both sides.” And if politicians truly want to address incivility and violence, they can address the system which underpins the Trump administration.

Every day the Trump administration chips away at rights and liberties previously won, government officials commit violence.

Every day elected representatives in Congress take a bit more from the poor and working class to enrich the rich, violence is committed.

Every day that Immigration and Customs Enforcement rips apart more immigrant families seeking asylum in America and deploys more troops at the border, more violence is committed.

Every day that wars, which kill countless civilians are prolonged, a cycle of violence is fueled.

Every day the Trump administration shrugs at communities wrecked by climate change—because protecting the fossil fuel industry is more important than a future that includes a habitable planet—officials perpetrate violence.

That violence is the source of discontent and resentment among citizens. It greatly impacts both sides of the electorate yet only one side—political elites beholden to corporate and military power—perpetuate the violence and ensure that the country is ripe for the spread of ultra-authoritarian nationalism of the Trump variety.