The Risk of Lone Actor Terrorism: TRAP-18

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On Demand Training Module

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Lone Terrorist (actor, offender)

• Research, planning, preparation, and implementation of an act of terrorism without any external command or control

• May operate in pairs, but usually alone
A Lone Wolf?

Database:
- Puckett (2001) FBI study of 10 lone terrorists
- Sageman (2008) large database of "leaderless jihad"
- Simon (2013) small sample of prominent lone terrorists in North America and Europe
- Spaaij (2012) studied 88 lone terrorists in 15 countries in North America and Europe
- Meloy direct and indirect assessment of lone terrorists in US in work with FBI and other consultations (1990-2014)

Additional Studies:
Additional Studies:

- Meloy (April, 2016). FBI LEB. (leb.fbi.gov)

TRAP-18: Terrorist Radicalization Assessment Protocol

- What it is:
  - An investigative template
- What it is becoming:
  - A validated risk assessment instrument (SPJ)
TRAP-18:
Proximal Warning Behaviors (8)
- Pathway
- Fixation
- Identification
- Novel aggression
- Energy burst
- Leakage
- Directly communicated threat
- Last resort behavior

TRAP-18:
Distal Characteristics (10)
- Personal grievance and moral outrage
- Framed by an ideology
- Failure to affiliate
- Dependence on the virtual community
- Thwarting of occupational goals

TRAP-18:
Distal Characteristics (10)
- Changes in thinking and emotion
- Failure of sexual pair-bonding
- Mental disorder
- Creative and innovative
- History of criminal violence
TRAP-18:
Warning Behaviors

- Pathway
- Fixation
- Identification
- Novel aggression
- Energy burst
- Leakage
- Directly communicated threat
- Last resort behavior

Warning Behaviors

- Patterns of behavior rather than individual risk factors: *pattern analysis*
- Origins in German gestalt psychology (Wertheimer, Koffka, Kohler)
- Proximally related to violence
Gestalt Psychology

• How can I read these words without vowels?

Pathway Warning Behavior

Any behavior that is part of research, planning, preparation, or implementation of an attack (Fein & Vossekuil, 1998, 1999; Calhoun & Weston, 2003)—late stage markers following decision to act.

Pathway to Targeted or Intended Violence

The “Grievance”

Violent Ideation

Research & Planning the Attack

Pre-attack Preparation

Probing & Breaches

Attack

Descent

Escalation

De-escalation

Lead up

Adapted with permission from F.S. Calhoun and S.W. Weston (2003). Contemporary threat management: A practical guide for identifying, assessing and managing individuals of violent intent. © 2003 F.S. Calhoun and S.W. Weston. All rights reserved.
Fixation Warning Behavior

Any behavior that indicates an increasingly pathological preoccupation with a person or a cause (Mullen et al., 2009). It typically causes deterioration of social and occupational functioning.

Malik Hasan

Pathological Fixation

- During psychiatric residency and fellowship (2003-2009) at Walter Reed gave three presentations which focused upon Muslims in the military, with no regard for the psychiatric purpose of these talks.
- This disjuncture illustrates his fixation.
- His social and occupational life also was clearly deteriorating.
Identification Warning Behavior

Any behavior that indicates a psychological desire to be a "pseudocommando" (Dietz, 1986; Knoll, 2010), have a "warrior mentality" (Hempel et al., 1999), closely associate with weapons or other military or law enforcement paraphernalia, identify with previous attackers or assassins, or to identify oneself as an agent to advance a particular cause or belief system.

Novel Aggression Warning Behavior

An act of violence which appears unrelated to any targeted violence pathway warning behavior which is committed for the first time. Such behaviors may be utilized to test the ability (de Becker, JACA, 1997) of the subject to actually do a violent act, or a behavioral tryout (MacCulloch, Snowden, Wood & Mills, 1983).

Michael Zehaf-Bibeau

- October 22, 2014
- Killed Cpl. Nathan Cirillo, injured three others
- Stormed Canadian Parliament and killed by Sgt. at Arms
- History
  - 32 yo loner, drifter, mentally unstable, drug addict, nonviolent criminal, then radical Islamist
  - Automobile killing of Canadian soldier by Martin Couture-Rouleau two days earlier near Montreal

Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
December, 2011
• Walked into RCMP in Burnaby, said he committed an armed robbery a decade earlier and wanted to be arrested; but no record.
• The next night, he tried to rob a McDonald's restaurant with a sharpened stick, and waited for the police to arrive:
  – "I'm a crack addict and at the same time a religious person, and I want to sacrifice freedom and good things for a year maybe, so when I come out I'll appreciate things in life more and be clean."

Energy Burst Warning Behavior

An increase in the frequency or variety of any noted activities related to the target, even if the activities themselves are relatively innocuous, usually in the days or weeks before the attack (Odgers et al., 2009).
Energy Burst Warning Behavior, January 7-8, 2011

- Drops off 35 mm film at Walgreen’s evening of Jan. 7 before midnight
- Checks into Motel 6 shortly after midnight
- Searches web for “assassins” and “lethal injection”
- 0219 picks up photos, makes a purchase

Jared Loughner

- Leaves telephone message with friend
- 0412 posts to Myspace page photo of Glock 19 and words, “Goodbye friends.”
- 0600 visits Walmart and Circle K stores

Energy Burst (cont’d)

- Unable to purchase ammunition at first Walmart, purchases 9 mm full metal jacket ammo and diaper bag at 0727
- Stopped by police officer for running a red light
- Confronted by father at home, runs away
- Returns to Circle K, gets a cab, goes to supermarket where he insists on getting correct change for cab ride
Energy Burst (cont’d)

• Sixteen minutes later, opens fire at 10:10, killing 6 and wounding 13 people
• Tackled by 3 senior citizens when he attempts to reload

Leakage Warning Behavior

The communication to a third party of an intent to do harm to a target through an attack (Meloy & O'Toole, Behavioral Sciences and the Law, 29:513-527, 2011).

Open Source Social Media

• “Greetings!...I am in USA now but we don’t have any arms. But is it possible to commit ourselves as dedicated martyrs anyway while here? What I’m saying is to shoot Obama, and then get shot ourselves, will it do? That will strike fear in the hearts of infidels.”
  • Abdurasul Juraboev, Hilofatnews.com, Aug. 8, 2014
Federal District Court, Feb., 2015

Last Resort Warning Behavior

Evidence of a violent “time/action imperative” (Mohandie & Duffy, 1999). Increasing desperation or distress through declaration in word or deed, forcing the individual into a position of last resort. There is no alternative other than violence, and the consequences are justified (de Becker, 1997). The subject feels trapped (S. White, personal communication). Usually preceded by a triggering event (past/future: internal/external).

“I have no choice. I am not in the position to, alone, go into the ghetto and fight. I chose Charleston because it is most historic city in my state, and at one time had the highest ratio of blacks to Whites in the country. We have no skinheads, no real KKK, no one doing anything but talking on the internet. Well someone has to have the bravery to take it to the real world, and I guess that has to be me.”
Directly Communicated Threat
Warning Behavior

The communication of a direct threat to the target or law enforcement beforehand. A threat is a written or oral communication that implicitly or explicitly states a wish or intent to damage, injure, or kill the target, or individuals symbolically or actually associated with the target.

Stockholm, Dec. 11, 2010

- "Now, your children—daughters and sisters—will die like our brothers and sisters and children are dying...our actions will speak for themselves. As long as you do not end your war against Islam and the insult against the prophet and your stupid support for that pig Vilks...all mujahedeen...now it's time to attack. Do not wait any longer. Come forth with whatever you have, even if it is a knife, and I know that you can bring more than knives. Fear no one. Do not be afraid of jail. Do not fear death."

Taimour al-Abdaly

- 28 year old Iraqi Sunni
- Emigrated to Sweden age 10
- Attended university in UK
- Detonated a car, and a few minutes later, blew himself up with a pipe bomb 200 meters away
TRAP-18: Distal Characteristics

• Personal grievance and moral outrage
• Framed by an ideology
• Failure to affiliate with actual group
• Dependence on the virtual community
• Thwarting of occupational goals

TRAP-18: Distal Characteristics

• Changes in thinking and emotion
• Failure of sexual pair-bonding
• Mental disorder
• Creative and innovative
• History of criminal violence
1. Personal Grievance and Moral Outrage

• Combining of personal grievance and moral outrage concerning historical or contemporaneous religious or political events

• Moral outrage is victim identification, but lone terrorist has not personally experienced the suffering of the victimized group: trees, animals, aborted fetuses, taxpayers, religious/ethnic groups, politically oppressed groups, delusional groups

Personal Grievance +

• McVeigh wanted to be the “ultimate warrior.”
• Failed the first endurance run during assessment and selection for U.S. Army Green Berets in Ft. Bragg, N.C.
• Invited to try again in six months, but did not; humiliated and angered by experience of rejection. Subsequently left U.S. Army.
Moral Outrage
- Attended as an observer the standoff between the Branch Davidians (radical sect of Seventh Day Adventists) in Waco, TX, and the FBI/ATF in February-April, 1993
- Enraged when he saw the Branch Davidian compound burn to the ground on April 19, 1993; 76 people died, including their leader, David Koresh
- McVeigh blamed the federal government for intentionally murdering the sect

April 19, 1993

2. Framed by an Ideology
- Intent to act is framed by an ideology or belief system: religion, politics, secular commitment, one issue, idiosyncratic
- Violence is sanctioned by an external moral authority
- On closer exam, cherry-picked phrases are used to justify violence toward others
- Morality becomes a simplistic choice between perceived good and evil
Sovereign Citizens (US) or Freemen (Canada)

- Heir to the Patriot Movement in the U.S. and posse comitatus—do not believe in federal or state government authority, esp taxes, licenses, control of lands, etc; ideology apparent in Oregon standoff, January, 2015
ISIS Recruitment Elements

- The West hates Islam
- The West is at war with Islam
- Therefore, it is every Muslim’s duty to attack an unbeliever(s) wherever he or she is

3. Failure to Affiliate with an Extremist Group

- Rejection of or by an extremist group further isolates and hardens the belief system and intent to be violent
- Typically due to a lifelong pattern of interpersonal difficulties and more violent expressions than group will tolerate
- Will then turn to the internet in search of like-minded violent true believers
The Lone Terrorist
Kathleen Puckitt, CT FBI, 2001

• Intensive study of primary source material, including clinical interview data, of 10 lone terrorists in the U.S.

• Tim McVeigh, Joseph Franklin, John Salvi, Eric Rudolph, Buford Furrow, Ted Kaczynski, Benjamin Smith, Paul Hill, Michael Griffin, Terry Nichols

Major Finding and Operational Implication

**Major finding:** Attempt to affiliate with an extremist group led to rejection and further hardening of radical position and violent intent

**Operational implication:** Be acutely observant of those who attempt to affiliate and are rejected, whether by a real or virtual community of extremists who have bonded under one cause or banner

**ISIS dilemma:** Inspiration, not affiliation, drives motivation

Rev. Paul Hill
Paul Hill

- Minister of orthodox Presbyterian Church in Florida
- Excommunicated by church members for his radicalization concerning the anti-abortion movement
- Killed Paul Britton, MD, 3 years later in 1994 with shotgun attack at a rally outside clinic

4. Dependence on the Virtual Community

- Paranoid pseudo-community (Cameron)
  - The fantasy of being persecuted
- Pronoid pseudo-community
  - The fantasy of belonging

Nadir Soofi and Elton Simpson
May 3, 2015, Texas
5. Thwarting of Occupational Goals

- Disillusioned with the social order
- Resentful of narcissistic wounding due to history of slights, rejections, failures
- “In-betweeners” (Ollson, 2005; Singer, 1995)
- Identity confusion vs. identity integration (Erikson, 1950)
6. Changes in Thinking and Emotion

- Willingness to argue diminishes
- Becomes more humorless, strident, with dogmatic preaching
- Beliefs become more rigid, simplistic, and absolute
- Embraces a “moral authority:” don’t think, just believe
- Common to all fundamentalist beliefs, regardless of content of the beliefs

Fantasy

- “Narcissistic linking fantasy:” a special and idealized relationship with another (Meloy, 1998)
- May be a leader, religious figure, political figure, soldier, assassin, warrior, older sibling, father, etc.
- Usually fantasy is omnipotent, grandiose and violent
- Compensates for chronic real world failures and depleted narcissism in day to day experiences
- Identification warning behavior (Meloy et al., 2012)
Emotion

- Sensitized to rejection, leading to anger or rage at blamed object, a defense against shame
- Secrecy leads to "clandestine excitement" (R. Collins, Univ. Pennsylvania)

Moral emotion sequence
- Anger > contempt > disgust
Matsumoto Studies

- Matsumoto et al., Current Directions in Psychological Science, 24:369-373, 2015
  - ANCODI tested with Nazis and Gandhi followers
  - All three elevated 3 months prior to violent event
  - Only anger elevated prior to nonviolent event

7. Failure of Sexual Pair-Bonding

- Historical failures to maintain a stable and generally positive attachment with a sexual intimate.

Anders Breivik
8. Mental Disorder

- Presence of a diagnosed mental disorder
- Some terrorism researchers have asserted that terrorists are normal (Post, Sageman)
- Others have shown that lone terrorists have more evidence of psychopathology (Spaaij, Gill)
- Nexus: ideology may provide a rationalization for symptoms of mental disorder, and intellectually buffer and help manage the anxiety of a decompensating mind
Corner & Gill, Law and Human Behavior, 2014

- 119 lone terrorists vs. matched sample of group based terrorists
- 13.49 times more likely to have a mental illness than group based terrorists
- 18.07 times more likely to have a partner involved in the wider movement than group based terrorist
- Proximate upcoming life change
- Victim of recent prejudice
- Proximate and chronic stress

Corner, Gill & Mason, Studies in Conflict and Terrorism, 2015

[Graphical data representation]

[Image of a person]
Sirhan Sirhan

- Defense: paranoid schizophrenia and dissociative disorder
- Prosecution: borderline schizophrenia (borderline personality disorder) with histrionic and paranoid features
- Retaliation for betrayal of his person (transference) and of his people (Palestinians-Arabs) by Robert Kennedy
- Avenging the Six Day War in 1967 which Israel won
Ted Kaczynski

- Court-ordered evaluation: paranoid schizophrenia; paranoid personality disorder with avoidant and antisocial features (S. Johnson psych report)
- Identification with the Luddites, 19th century British textile workers who protested technology, and hatred of advancing "technological society"

9. Greater Creativity and Innovation

- No bureaucratic stifling due to need for approval by those in charge of terrorist organization
- Absence of fear of failure
- No need to consider political, military, or social blowback from attack (Simon, Sageman)
- Operational definition: innovative and/or imitated
Bruce Ivins, Ph.D.

Anthrax attacks, two waves, in September and October, 2001: killed 5 people, injured 17

Most prominent anthrax researcher in USG

Motivated by:
- Revenge
- Need for personal validation
- Career preservation and professional redemption
- Loss
- Also obsessed with and stalked a sorority house

Expert Behavioral Analysis Panel (2011)

Lee Malvo and John Mohammad
Washington, DC, Oct., 2002, 10 killed, 3 wounded

Inspire Magazine

Make a bomb in the kitchen of your Mom

The AQ Chef

Added more explosive powder and altered detonation device
10. History of Criminal Violence

- Capacity for predation has been acted upon previously
- Emotion (anger) dissipates as mode of violence shifts to predation, and planning and preparation begins
- Serves tactical success by surprising target
- Morally sanctioned by belief system: superego-driven homicidal aggression; usually not valueless psychopathic predation, but may be...

Charlie Hebdo, January, 2015

Does TRAP-18 work in the real world?

Validity Studies

- Potentially lethal nonterrorist attackers of public figures in Germany, 1968-2004 (n=14)
- All warning behaviors present
- Pathway and fixation most common warning behaviors; leakage and direct threat least common warning behaviors
- First test of ecological validity

Frequency of Warning Behaviors for German Public Figure Attackers (n=14)

US Presidential and Political Attackers and Assassins

- Richard Lawrence
- John Wilkes Booth
- Charles Guiteau
- Leon Czolgosz
- John Schrank
- Guiseppe Zangara
- Carl Weiss
- Oscar Collazo
- Griselio Torresola
- Lee Harvey Oswald
- James Earl Ray
- Sirhan Sirhan
- Arthur Bremer
- Samuel Byck
- Lynette Fromme
- Sara Jane Moore
- John Hinckley, Jr.
- Francisco Duran
Comparison of German School Shooters and Other Students of Concern

- 1999-2010
- All male, ages 15-23
- 37 victims killed, 78% used a firearm
- 56% former students who returned
- Students of concern aged 16-22, 89% current students, none planned to attack
Comparison of shooters and other students of concern

Shooters, greater frequency of:
- Pathway
- Fixation
- Identification
- Novel aggression
- Last resort

Effect size (phi coefficients)
- 0.61-0.875 (large)
- p < .001
- Fisher exact test due to small sample sizes

*Meloy et al. (2014). JTAM, 2:3/4

Meloy, Roshdi, Glaz-Ocik & Hoffmann, JTAM, 2:3/4

- “Investigating the individual terrorist in Europe”
- N=22 terrorists, 7 of whom were in 3 autonomous cells
- Reliability, content validity of TRAP-18; comparison of lone actors and autonomous cells
Interrater reliability

- Kappa mean = .895 (0.69-1.0)

Meloy et al., JTAM, 2:3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics of the European Terrorists (N=22)</th>
<th>Individual Terrorist</th>
<th>Autonomous Cell</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal Grievance and Moral Outrage****</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Framed by an Ideology****</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure to Affiliate with an Extremist Group</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependence on the Virtual Community</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling of Isolation/Status</td>
<td>91.7%</td>
<td>71.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radicalization Fuelled by Disservice of Thinking and Change in Emotion****</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure of Sexual-Intimate Pair Bonding</td>
<td>78.57%</td>
<td>28.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Disorder</td>
<td>53.85%</td>
<td>28.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater Creativity and Innovation</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>71.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predatory (criminal) Violence by History</td>
<td>21.43%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Individual Terrorist

Autonomous Cell
Meloy et al., JTAM, 2:3

<table>
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<th>Warning Behavior Typeology (N=22)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Fixation</td>
<td>100%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Identification</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fixation</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy Burst</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leakage</td>
<td>83.33%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct Threat</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last resort</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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US Lone Actor Terrorists (N=25)
Meloy, Genzman et al.

Proximal Warning Behaviors in American Sample
Distal Characteristics in American Sample

Meloy & Gill (N=111 lone terrorists), JTAM, 2016

• U.S. and Europe
• Convicted of their active planning or died during commission of their attack
• 1990-2014 (25 years)
• “the use of threat or action designed to influence the government or intimidate the public and/or advance a political, religious, or secular cause.”

Method

• Utilized Gill codebook to identify data which would allow for coding of TRAP-18 variables as present or absent
• Coded entire sample
• Compared across ideologies
• Compared across thwarted or successful attacks
Lone Actor Terrorists

- Pathway: 80%
- Fixation: 77%
- Identification: 77%
- Novel Aggression: 17%
- Energy Burst: 8%
- Leakage: 85%
- Last Resort: 28%
- Directly Communicated Threat: 22%

Lone Actor Terrorists

- Personal grievance and moral outrage: 78%
- Framed by an ideology: 100%
- Failure to affiliate with extremist group: 29%
- Dependence on virtual community: 49%
- Thwarting of occupational goals: 55%
- Changes in thinking and emotion: 88%
- Failure of sexual intimate pair bonding: 84%
- Mental illness: 41%
- Creativity and innovation: 29%
- Criminal violence by history: 30%

Operational Application

- 70% demonstrated at least half of the TRAP variables
- >76% had 4 warning behaviors: pathway, fixation, identification, and leakage
- >77% had 4 distal characteristics: personal grievance and moral outrage, ideological frame, changes in thinking and emotion, failure of sexual pair bond
Comparison of Ideologies

• Jihadist (n=38)
• Extreme right wing (n=43)
• Single issue (n=30)

Comparative Ideologies

• Equivalence across all variables except for four:
  – Personal grievance and moral outrage
  – Dependence on the virtual community
  – Fixation
  – Thwarting of occupational goals

Operational Application

• TRAP-18 appears to be useful regardless of ideology driving the terrorist motivation
Successful v. Thwarted Attackers

• Successful (n=67): carried out the attack
• Thwarted (n=44): plots that were developed by a lone terrorist and then were interrupted/stopped by law enforcement intervention and led to a conviction

Successful Attackers

• Less likely pathway warning behavior (phi=.264)
• More likely to fail at sexual-intimate pair bonding (phi = .293)
• More likely to be creative and innovative (phi = .190)
• More likely to be fixated (phi = .204)
• Less likely to be dependent on the virtual community (phi = .317)

Operational Application

• More socially isolated, more time to plan and prepare without interruption
• Need to think “outside the box” as threat assessors for innovative (not done before) tactics
• Watch for indications of obsessive preoccupation with a cause, most likely through social media postings
• Pathway behavior less apparent: secrecy, luck, or inadequate intelligence?
• Less interaction with like minded true believers through listservs, blogs, etc.
Monahan and Steadman, 1996

- Violent storms and violent people. 
  American Psychologist 51:931-938

- Watching—cluster of distal characteristics> monitor the case
- Warning—one proximal warning behavior> actively manage the case
- Code warning behaviors first

TRAP-18: Proximal Warning Behaviors
- Pathway
- Fixation
- Identification
- Novel aggression
- Energy burst
- Leakage
- Directly communicated threat
- Last resort behavior

TRAP-18: Distal Characteristics

- Personal grievance and moral outrage
- Framed by an ideology
- Failure to affiliate with actual group
- Dependence on the virtual community
- Thwarting of occupational goals
TRAP-18: Distal Characteristics

- Changes in thinking and emotion
- Failure of sexual pair-bonding
- Mental disorder
- Creative and innovative
- History of criminal violence

Eric Hoffer, *The True Believer*, 1951

“The vanity of the selfless, even those who practice utmost humility, is boundless.”
Thank you

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