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A Typology of Lone Wolves: Preliminary Analysis of Lone Islamist Terrorists

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Developments in Radicalisation and Political Violence

Summary

The troublesome question of how and whether to consider
what are commonly referred to as Lone Wolf terrorists within
the broader roster of terrorist groups is something that has
regularly confounded security analysts for a variety of
reasons. This article attempts to create some sort of
typology to start to define the group, with specific reference
to the instances of Lone Wolves (or Lone Wolf Packs, an
admittedly paradoxical choice of words that is defined in the
article as small, isolated groups of individuals involved in
terrorism) who claim to adhere to an extremist Islamist
ideology. The article offers four subsets to the definition,
drawing upon a detailed analysis of a variety of different plots
in Europe and North America: Loner, Lone Wolf, Lone Wolf
Pack, and Lone Attacker. The purpose of the article is to offer
some preliminary thoughts on the issue of Lone Wolves, and
start a process towards deeper understanding and closer
analysis of the phenomenon. This is of particular salience
given the frequency with which security analysts cite the
phenomenon as a threat and the increasing way in which
Al Qaeda ideologues refer to it.

About the Author

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A Typology of Lone Wolves: Preliminary Analysis of Lone Islamist Terrorists

It's the lone-wolf strategy that I think we have to pay attention to as the main threat to this country.
Leon Panetta, CIA Director, February 2010

The phenomenon of lone individuals involved in terrorism is not new, nor is the phenomenon of lone individuals inspiring public terror through carrying out an act of mass murder for their own reasons: the two are in fact sometimes indistinguishable. However, with the growth of the Al Qaeda ideology (here also described as Al Qaedism/Al Qaedist) that seems able to superimpose a violent supremacist ideology upon a wide variety of grievances, there is a growing sense of concern at the possible confluence of the two phenomena and the potential risk this might create. In other words, Al Qaeda's ability to provide a persuasive anti-establishment ideology with transnational appeal, alongside the easy accessibility of its narrative and potential operational support through the internet, makes it very easy for an alienated loner to both feel he is a part of the group, as well as participate. Given the increasing ease with which individuals can build viable devices of varying yields using readily available items to attempt terrorist attacks, it seems as though this group deserves more attention. Both due to the increased threat that might be posed by such an individual due to their enhanced potential capacity, but also as it increasingly seems as though Al Qaeda and affiliated movements are attempting

to co-opt the notion of the Lone Attacker into their notion of a 'borderless idea.'[1]

Surprisingly, however, there has been little research into defining the strategic potential of this phenomenon, or much in-depth analysis of the specific phenomenon of 'Loner' terrorism as it exists as a sub-set of violent Islamist terrorism. While researching this article, the author was surprised to find very little research on the topic.[2] There have been numerous different attempts to develop a terminology to define the threat: Christopher Hewitt and Harvey Kushner separately deploy the term 'freelance terrorism,'[3] while polemicist Daniel Pipes describes such individual cases as 'sudden jihad syndrome.'[4] Drawing on interviews with specialists at the National Counterterrorism Center in Northern Virginia, U.S., reporter David Ignatius revealed that for analysts there, 'my doomsday scenario, aside from weapons of mass destruction, is personalized jihad.'[5] The majority of analysts, however, simply describe the group as 'loners,' 'lone wolves,' or 'lone attackers' clustering them in a separate category.

The reasons for this lack of analysis are complex. In Ramon Spaaji's mind, the reason is that 'terrorism is commonly viewed as essentially a collective, organized activity and, as a consequence, scholars focus predominantly on group

1   This notion was raised in the January 2011 edition of *Inspire* magazine published by Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). The article highlighted the respective attempted 'loner' attacks by Roshonara Choudhry and Taimour Abdulwahab al-Abdaly and offered that their attempts were part of a globalised insurgency and 'borderless idea' that Al Qaeda was trying to promote. Muhammad al-Sana'ani, 'Roshonara and Taimour: followers of the borderless loyalty', *Inspire*, Winter 1431, January 2010
2   A number of prominent authors and analysts touch upon the phenomenon in their writings, and a comprehensive review of available material is provided in 'Lone Wolf Terrorism' (COT, Instituut voor Veiligheids en Crisismanagement, 6 July, 2007). More recently, Ramon Spaaji, 'The Enigma of Lone Wolf Terrorism: An Assessment', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, vol.33, no.9, September 2010, pp. 854-870 provides an updated overview. But to this author's knowledge a comprehensive global categorisation of the phenomenon appears to be absent from the canon at this point.
3   Both are referred to in the in 'Lone Wolf Terrorism', (COT, Instituut voor Veiligheids en Crisismanagement, 6 July, 2007).
4   Daniel Pipes, 'The Quiet-spoken Muslims who turn to terror', *New York Sun*, March 14, 2006
5   David Ignatius, 'Thinking through Doomsday', *Washington Post*, May 23, 2008

dynamics and collective socialization to explain individual pathways into terrorism.'[6] This element can also complicate matters in countries where there is a tendency towards judiciaries being sceptical of convicting individuals for terrorism.[7] In the author's mind, this point is accentuated by the difficulties in discerning what plots merit inclusion under such a profile. Lone assailants sometimes appear to be troubled by psychological issues that can seem to separate them out from the broader dataset of 'rational' individuals who become involved in jihadist terrorism. For the counter-terrorism community, the occurrence of mental illness (or at least an acute social awkwardness) has accentuated this problem, since it suggests that this issue might simply be a mental health and policing problem distinct from an organised terrorist threat. This is not to say that all lone wolves are mentally ill, but when one compares the instance of mental health issues amongst the roster of individuals involved in organised terrorism (where it is very low) to that of Lone Wolves (where it is higher than average), it can appear to be a defining factor.[8] As Marc Sageman put it in response to a question during a conference in London in July 2010, 'there are two kinds of Lone Wolves, real lone wolves and mass murderers' – according to Sageman's analysis the real lone wolves are usually 'part of a virtual community,' while the mass murderers have their own personal 'insane' ideology.[9] But from an outside perspective, the difference between the two can be quite hard to distinguish.

This can create a separate community for counter-terrorism analysts, who will look at the Lone Wolf category as simply being one that they will encounter post-fact and that is by its nature almost impossible to predict and prevent. The

6   Ramon Spaaji, *Op.Cit.*
7   The example that was cited to the author was in Norway, where prosecutors find themselves needing to prove the existence of more than one plotter to cross the threshold of guilt required for a sound conviction for terrorist acts.
8   As the abovementioned Dutch report highlights, the majority of those they include in their dataset of Lone Wolves demonstrate some level of mental health troubles – it should be emphasised, however, that their dataset expands far beyond the borders of Islamist motivation that is included in this paper. A subsidiary piece of research that might be generated from this research is to appreciate the instances of mental health issues amongst Lone Wolves claiming an Islamist bent.
9   Marc Sageman, paraphrasing comments made at the House of Commons in response to a question, July 13, 2010

observation runs that the nature of the Lone Wolf means that he or she will not be in any contact with others, is unlikely to have gone abroad for training and is unlikely to be actively seeking to purchase any weaponry – all of which would be the traditional trip-wires for security services to become switched on to a terrorist cell or individual. If one assesses Lone Wolves to be individuals with mental health or social issues who are randomly lashing out, it is unlikely that they are going to necessarily trip any of these wires. In simpler terms: it is possible to conceptualise a strategy for countering an organisation with defined aims that is attempting to attack the state, but it is almost impossible to do the same when dealing with mentally ill loners who will lead quiet lives until one day they decide to strike out against the society in which they live.

But operating using this set of presuppositions is something that might in fact be challenged by the appeal of the Al Qaedist ideology to what might paradoxically be termed the 'community of loners' and the increasing prevalence of the internet as a vehicle through which to disseminate jihadist ideology. The easy accessibility of the ideology, alongside the ability of the internet to connect radicals on one side of the world with loners on the other (as well as the ability of the internet to transmit information on how to build devices and other tactical ideas), means that it is possible to imagine a fusion of the two and thus the fostering of a dangerous tactical threat.[10]

Furthermore, within an Islamist context, it is possible to discern a growing importance and emphasis being placed by influential ideologues like Abu Musab al-Suri and Anwar al-Awlaki on individual jihad and of small cells taking up action wherever they are able to in furtherance of Al Qaeda's more general global ambitions.[11] Similarly, Al Qaeda's American spokesman Adam Gadahn openly praised Nidal Hassan Malik (the man who opened fire at Fort Hood), calling upon other

Muslims to follow his lead.[12] According to prominent terrorism analyst Bruce Hoffman, Al Qaeda's new strategy 'is to empower and motivate individuals to commit acts of violence completely outside any terrorist chain of command.'[13] While it may be a slightly premature conclusion to reach that it is such ideologues' influence that is behind the growth of the phenomenon of Lone Wolves using extreme violent Islamism as their justification, it would seem as though Al Qaeda is starting to move in this direction. In the January 2011 edition of *Inspire* magazine, AQAP published an article that praised Roshonara Choudhry (the British woman who tried to kill MP Steven Timms and who will be looked at in greater detail later) and Taimour Abdulwahab al-Abdaly (an Iraqi-Swede who blew himself up outside a shopping mall in Stockholm around Christmas 2010) and offered them as individuals drawn by a 'borderless idea.' Clearly there is an interest from Al Qaeda ideologues to try to bridge the gap between the random nature of these individuals and their jihadist global outlook.

The phenomenon of Lone Wolf terrorism, however, is one that crosses ideological boundaries and the intention is that the typology outlined in this paper is to offer a set of definitions that are applicable to other ideologically defined datasets. A brief glance at a broad public dataset of lone individuals involved in terrorist or violent activity inspiring terror in the broader public (an important distinction to highlight, as it can sometimes appear as though an individual who goes insane and carries out an act of random violence will later dress it up in an extremist ideology[14]) would seem to indicate that what can broadly be termed as Lone Wolves makes up a substantial portion of those involved. But this is to consciously blur the boundary between individuals who get involved in ideological terrorism alone and lone individuals who for their own reasons seek to express rage

10   In many ways, this is not a new tactical threat: similarities can be drawn amongst the earlier 'leaderless resistance' approach taken by white supremacist movements. For more information, please see: Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, (London: Victor Gollancz, 1998), p.118

11   For more on Al-Suri, please see Bryjar Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad*, (London: Hurst & Co., 2007); for more on Awlaki, please see Evan Kohlmann, Op. Cit., or Anwar al-Awlaki, 'Constants on the path of jihad.'

12   'Adam Gadhan praises Nidal Hassan, calls for more Lone Wolf attacks,' published by MEMRI, March 8, 2010

13   Bruce Hoffman, cited in Nancy Gibbs, 'The Fort Hood killer: terrified….or terrorist?', *Time*, November 11, 2009

14   When analysing her interviews with Mir Aimal Kansi, Jessica Stern astutely highlights the fact that 'terrorists often use slogans of various kinds to mask their true motives.' Jessica Stern, *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill*, (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), p.181

through the mass murder of fellow citizens.[15] In other words if we take the definition of a Lone Wolf to include every individual (or small cell of individuals) who intends to kill fellow citizens for ideological or personal reasons then we have created a potentially large dataset. In the interests of brevity and creating some initial coherence for preliminary analysis (as well as in order to offer some coherent thoughts on an evolution of the most immediate terrorist threat to trouble governments), the main focus of this article is individuals who deploy violent Islamist justifications for their terrorist acts in Europe and North America. This will further help ascertain whether there are peculiarities to violent Islamist Lone Wolves which can be usefully identified and which can then be compared to a broader dataset of Lone Wolves calling upon other ideologies to understand the phenomenon more broadly.

Using, for the most part, open source reporting and coverage of plotters in Europe and North America, this article will first define the phenomenon of Lone Wolf terrorists, outlining the terminology as it is being used in this context, as well as providing an overview of the phenomenon within the context of violent Islamist terrorism in the West. It will then offer four different typologies of lone terrorists, using specific examples to highlight the particular characteristics of each group: the Loner; the Lone Wolf; the Lone Wolf Pack; and the Lone Attacker. Some analysis will then be provided as to which group is, tactically speaking, the most effective. Furthermore the relevance and importance of each group will be explored within the context of each other. Finally, the article will offer some initial concluding thoughts on the phenomenon of Lone Wolves, analysing its recent apparent growth, while looking towards further avenues for future analysis.

A final introductory note is necessary to highlight that the overall dataset being used is in fact quite small, making absolute and scientifically satisfactory conclusions somewhat difficult to draw. While the author has attempted to collect

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15   The aforementioned report, 'Lone Wolf Terrorism' (COT, Instituut voor Veiligheids eh Crisismanagement, 6 July, 2007), highlights the problems involved in defining Lone Wolves and of the unreliability of current databases (like the RAND-MIPT Terrorism Knowledge Base).

multiple instances to highlight each of the four groups, the actual instance of Lone Wolf Islamist inspired or driven terrorism in the West is quite small (and the availability of reliable information sometimes quite limited), providing in some cases an awkwardly small dataset. Nonetheless, it is possible to draw some useful preliminary thoughts that could be expanded and clarified using a broader dataset. This includes a more comprehensive overview of Lone Wolf terrorists calling upon other ideologies as well as instances that occur but receive very little publicity and have thus escaped the author's attention.

Defining Terms

Before advancing any further, it is useful to first identify some terms and ideas central to the article. The term Lone Wolf terrorist in this article is used to refer to individuals pursuing Islamist terrorist goals alone, either driven by personal reasons or their belief that they are part of an ideological group (meaning a group of individuals who all claim to believe or follow a similar ideology: in this context, those who might be described as either members or followers of Al Qaeda or adherents to Al Qaedism). In the article, the term Lone Wolf is expanded out to Lone Wolf pack when referring to small isolated groups pursuing the goal of Islamist terrorism together under the same ideology, but without the sort of external direction from, or formal connection with, an organised group or network.

This is in contrast to the terrorist plots which are hatched by groups of individuals who are located within a broader network of extremists active in the West – either connected to Al Qaeda or one of its regional affiliates or synonyms. Those plots show evidence of either large support networks within the West (and usually deep links back to lawless regions in Asia or Africa), and levels of command and control. All of which means that they cannot be properly included in what can be defined as Lone Wolf terrorist plots. For the sake of comparison and to offer something of a control group for analysis, the last group in the dataset, Lone Attacker, is

included to highlight the difference between Lone Wolves and one-man terror cells dispatched by terrorist groups.

It is also important to highlight that often early analysis of a terrorist act will tend to focus on the Lone Wolf framework to provide some explanation for the sudden appearance of a terrorist plot (in a small group context, sometimes the conclusion is quickly reached that the group is self-radicalised or self-starter, both terms suggestive of the unaffiliated nature of the groups). In many instances, time and deeper exploration uncovers links to broader networks and shows that in fact what appeared in the first instance to be a surprise rapidly proves to be the product of a security failure or an effective plot by a terrorist network that had escaped the notice of the security services. For example, the July 7, 2005 bombings were in the first instance reported as being the product of a cell of what were described as 'clean-skins' who had self-radicalised outside traditional terror networks.[16] Analysis has shown that they were in fact linked into a broader network of British extremists, were already on security services radars, and were in contact with Al Qaeda central.[17] However, many of the preliminary aspects attributed to the July 7, 2005 group were what might be captured in the grouping described in this article as a Lone Wolf Pack. An earlier example of this phenomenon is the case of El Sayyid Nosair, the assassin of Rabbi Meir Kahane in New York, who was initially dismissed as a loner, but was later charged with involvement in the network behind the 1993 World Trade Center plot and 'Blind Sheikh' Omar Abdel Rahman.[18] It is therefore important to note that the term Lone Wolf is often erroneously deployed to provide easy explanations for what are often more complex terrorist attacks.

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16   David Leppard and Nick Fielding, 'The Hate', *Sunday Times*, July 10, 2005
17   *Could 7/7 Have Been Prevented? A Review of the Intelligence on the London Terrorist Attacks on 7 July 2005*, Intelligence and Security Committee, May 2009. Accessed: http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/210852/2009019_77review.pdf ; Raffaello Pantucci, 'The Tottenham Ayatollah and the Hook Handed Cleric: An examination of all their jihadi children', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, vol.33, no.3, March 2010, pp.226-245
18   USA vs Omar Ahmad Ali Abdel Rahman et al., January 17, 1996. Full sentencing transcript available at: http://intelfiles.egoplex.com/61HKRAHS-sentencing.htm

The central ideology which drives the terrorist cells and individuals at the focus of the article is the supremacist Islamist ideology espoused by Al Qaeda and related groups, which seeks to impose a global Caliphate brought about through terrorist atrocities intended to spur global Islamic consciousness. Al Qaeda and related groups consider themselves as being the vanguard of the struggle, as a core group of believers that is striking a path that the rest of the Muslim *ummah*[19] will follow. This core of 'rightly-guided' Muslims will take to the battlefield against the non-believers and will start a chain of events that will bring about the return of the global Caliphate. These believers might be dispersed, but they believe they are the only ones who have access to the correct information about God's wishes and desires. This is an outlook which tends to generate a high level of paranoia about the world and which requires an intense personal faith. In other words, an ideology which it is easy to imagine an alienated loner identifying with, or an individual seeking to provide some deeper meaning to an act of random violence.[20]

The increasing prevalence of the internet and the easy availability of extremist material online have fostered the growth of the autodidactic extremist. The loner leaning towards violence can now easily teach himself the extremist creed, and then define his global outlook along the same lines, using it as a justification when carrying out an act of violence. The concept of global jihad as defined by Al Qaeda is one that at a basic level is easy to transmit as well as understand, and which an individual seeking some deeper understanding of the world can attach himself to without needing much by way of tangible proof (and often the sort of proof that is required is seemingly readily available: the West is at war with Muslims, witness its invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq and support of Israel, etc). Furthermore, as a religious ideology, it is based primarily upon deep individual belief that is something which is highly personalised and the experience of which varies from person to person.

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19   'Community of believers'
20   It is also very similar to the 'leaderless resistance' espoused by far-right supremacists. Please see: Hoffman, *Op. Cit.*, p.118 and many other 'vanguard' movements.

This autodidactic element, however, complicates matters from an analytical perspective. While the intention of this article is to provide some overarching typology which might be used to explain the phenomenon of Lone Wolf terrorism more broadly, as mentioned previously, the intention in this preliminary phase of analysis is to understand the phenomenon of Lone Wolves in the context of Islamist extremism. The autodidactic element adds a complicating factor since it means that individuals can potentially have other motivations underlying their rationale for becoming involved in a terrorist act, but can with certain ease superimpose upon it their understanding of the Al Qaeda narrative. In other words, the loner who seeks attention through an act of terrorism – opening fire with an automatic weapon in a public place, or some other instance of random public violence – can quite quickly claim to be an Islamist warrior by quoting Osama bin Laden or using the widely available terminology associated with jihad and demonstrating some level of having 'googled' such topics. This is something that has been increasingly facilitated by the growth of the internet and the availability of Al Qaedist ideology online, and can somewhat complicate analysis of the Lone Wolf phenomenon.

A final complicating element is how exactly one defines violent Islamist terrorism: while on the one hand this is easy in theory (simply restrict oneself to those who talk about Islam as a feature of their motivation), in practice there is the prickly question of whether to include those whose main motiva-tions appear to be connected with anti-Zionism or anti-Israel sentiment. While commentators often conflate such sentiment with broader Al Qaedism (and Al Qaeda certainly calls upon the Palestinian troubles as one of the fronts in its global jihad), it is not always clear that those involved in the situations on the ground seek conflation or that the motivation is as clearly blended together as is suggested.[21] For the purposes of

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21   The case of Naveed Haq is questionable in this regard. He attacked a Jewish building, but was an Afghan Muslim who converted to Christianity, and who said his own religion was damaged. Yet he has been included in analyses of Islamist terrorists. Similarly, cases of terrorism against the West by Muslims prior to 9/11 tended to focus on the Palestinian issue as they motivation, and subsequent to 9/11, they started to be categorised under the same grouping. It is an entirely separate and complex paper about whether this is correct or not, but the point is that after 9/11 it has become very hard to analytically separate the two out.

this article, this distinction is largely lost since most included within the dataset come subsequent to the global emergence of Al Qaeda as a prominent force, making it very hard to not find some mention of the group within the addled justification for an action. This is worth bearing in mind when trying to analyse extreme Islamist terrorism, and in particular as one sees the growth in importance of regional affiliates or organisations which may or may not have actual links with Al Qaeda core and may have more local or regional concerns higher on their list of priorities.

Ideology is important to define within the context of this article as it is one of main determining factors. The dataset of Lone Wolves could theoretically be expanded to include those individuals who for their own reasons take up weapons and kill as many fellow citizens as they are able. These men, or women, become angered by the societies around them and seek vengeance by wreaking havoc in their immediate environment – this can express itself through firing weapons indiscriminately, through the detonation of a device, or through crashing a vehicle into a public building. As we shall see, there is some invariable overlap between this group and the groups outlined in the text, but in order to provide some initial coherence, the main theme of those included in this text are those that carry out their actions using the cover of extreme and violent Islamist rhetoric.

Four Possible Types of Lone Wolf Terrorists

At this point it is useful to turn to the four overarching groups that define the typology that this article offers as a prism through which to explore the phenomenon of lone wolves in the context of extremist Islamist terrorism. Inclu-sion in analysis is based upon two primary features: first, that the individuals or groups used an extremist Islamist ideology as their justification; second, that they appeared to carry out (or plot) their operation alone. Finally, in every instance an actual plot was uncovered and people were convicted for it: or an actual attack was carried out and those who appeared

responsible are currently far along in the conviction process (and were caught with the actual devices used to carry out the attack on their person).[22] In each of the four groups, examples are offered from the spectrum of plots in Europe and North America to clarify the defining features of the subset and their inclusion within the context of the lone wolf phenomenon. The four groups are captured under the following terms: Loner; Lone Wolf; Lone Wolf Pack; and Lone Attacker.

Loner

The Loner, within this context, is defined as an individual who plans or attempts to carry out an act of terrorism using the cover of extreme Islamist ideology. However, while he (or she) may utilise the ideological cover of an Islamist ideology to provide an explanation for their action, they do not appear to have any actual connection or contact with extremists – beyond what they are able to access through passive consumption on the internet or from society at large. There is no evidence of any external command and control. In many ways it can be hard to include such individuals properly within the context of ideologically driven Islamist extremists, as it is almost impossible to ascertain exactly what level of ideology they have actually imbued and how much it is simply being used as cover for other psychological or social issues. Instances where the individual has been proved to be clinically insane have not been included. The individuals within this group attempt to carry out or prepare for a terrorist incident and deploy an Islamist justification for their action, thus fulfilling the basic criteria for inclusion within the dataset for this article.

A prime example of this type is provided in the case of Nicholas Roddis, a 'rather inadequate'[23] 23-year old who was arrested by police in the second week of July 2007 when he returned to work in Sheffield having come into work a week before in Arabic garb, brandishing replica bullets and

'railway fog signal detonators,' which he boasted were live ammunition and landmines. Following his arrest, police searched his property and discovered acetone, hydrogen peroxide, nails and a recipe to make TATP – the only ingredient he was missing was acid, and he admitted to police to having attempted to obtain it, which was supported by corroborating evidence. At the time of arrest he was found in possession of a wealth of radical material, including recipes for other explosives as well as a collection of beheading videos and a poster of the former leader of Al-Qaeda in Iraq, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, on his wall. He also admitted to being responsible for a hoax bomb left on a bus in Rotherham that he had fashioned using two bags of sugar, some wiring, and an alarm clock he had purchased from Ebay. It was left in a bag along with a note in Arabic that purported to be from Al Qaeda in Iraq. The device set off a scare in the city, leading to an army bomb disposal unit being dispatched to detonate it and a portion of the city being evacuated.[24]

It initially appeared as though Nicholas Roddis was a convert to Islam, though he denied ever actually converting when on the stand. He did, however, have a clear interest in Islamist extremism, and the note he left with his fake device read:

> There is no God but Allah. Mohammed is the messenger of Allah. God is great. God is great. Britain must be punished. Signed the Al Qaeda organisation of Iraq.[25]

According to a variety of acquaintances and friends who testified at his trial and in the press, he was apparently fascinated by Islamist extremism and claimed to have identified a number of targets he could bomb. Despite this, it does not seem that he had any contact with active terrorists or extremists or that he was an agent of Al Qaeda in Iraq. It is not even completely clear whether he was a convert or not, and Roddis seems to be an unreliable witness in this regard. His own justification for his actions was that he was 'bored' having just lost a job and had a morbid curiosity about Islamist extremism and an interest in making fireworks. Nonetheless, he caused a major public disturbance and had

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22   There is an inevitable tension here naturally with the fact that some of the cases mentioned are ongoing. But those that have been included are those that it might reasonably be assumed that the actors on trial played some role.

23   Regina vs. Hassan Tabbakh, no.2008/4736/D5, March 3, 2009

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24   Regina vs. Nicholas Roddis, no.2008/4229/B5, March 12, 2009
25   *Ibid.*

assembled both a substantial volume of radical Islamist material and bomb making equipment, demonstrating a certain level of potential threat. In his sentencing comments when handing Roddis a seven-year term, Judge John Milford said 'he is angry at the way he sees the world and the way it treated him, he has found his focus in Islamic militancy.'[26]

A similar case is found in the case of Andrew 'Isa' Ibrahim, a young Muslim convert who in July 2009 was incarcerated after apparently plotting a suicide terror attack at a shopping mall in his native town of Bristol. Ibrahim, the son of a British woman and an Egyptian Coptic Christian father, was arrested by police after individuals in the local Muslim community alerted police having become concerned about some of the things he was saying and that he had shown up to his mosque with what looked like quite painful burns on his hands. Following his arrest, police searched his house and found a biscuit tin full of HMTD (Hexamethylene triperoxide diamine, a highly explosive substance), a suicide vest, a detonator and detailed notes and video footage of his intended target. Alongside the usual evidence of substantial online research into extremism and a fixation with jailed radical preacher Abu Hamza, Ibrahim also had videos showing him testing out his explosive.

Unlike Roddis, there was not doubt about Ibrahim's conversion to Islam, though he was likely an erratic follower in practice.[27] The specific timings of his conversion are unclear, with various accounts placing it sometime between 2005 and 2006. In February 2007, he officially changed his name by deed poll from Andrew Ibrahim to Isa Ibrahim, reflecting a definite shift to adopting an Islamic identity. Friends reported that he had an increasing obsession with Islamist ideology and would apparently alternate wearing what he perceived to be Islamic garb with other clothing. Beyond this, it appears as though Ibrahim was a troubled soul who was plagued by substance abuse problems and major rows with his parents that had led him to lead a relatively destitute life.[28] At the

time of his arrest, it seems as though his primary occupation was as a salesman of the *Big Issue* (a magazine in the United Kingdom that is sold by the homeless), though he was also sporadically attending classes at a local college. Similar to Roddis, Ibrahim claimed that he had built the vest and pursued the interest in extremism as something to keep him busy, with Ibrahim adding the detail that his intention was to keep himself away from drugs though he also claimed to have found solace in fantasising about female celebrities' feet.[29]

In both of these cases, we can see how young men with no apparent connections to actual extremists assembled substantial libraries of extremist material, gathered bomb-making materiel and apparently started to contemplate actual plots to undertake. However, in neither case were they able to move into action, though both took clear steps along a path which might easily have led them to carry out terrorist attacks which could have caused deaths and would likely have been blamed upon Islamic extremism. However, in neither case is there much evidence that they were connected to any wider network of radicals or that they had actual contact with known extremist networks. While both apparently boasted to friends and acquaintances of what they were doing, it seems as though for the most part the community around them ignored their statements or did not take them seriously.[30]

Beyond the United Kingdom, in July 4 2002, Hesham Mohammed Ali Hedayat opened fire at the El Al airlines ticket counter at Los Angeles International Airport, killing two and injuring others. A subsequent FBI report concluded that this was terrorism since he espoused anti-Israeli views and was opposed to US policy in the Middle East – as one 'source' told CNN, 'he wanted to be a martyr and take as many

26 Duncan Gardham, ' 'Islamic' bomb hoaxer Nicholas Roddis jailed', *Daily Telegraph*, July 18, 2008

27 'Vest suspect "was a drug addict" ', *BBC News*, June 15, 2009

28 Duncan Gardham, 'Andrew Ibrahim: How a public schoolboy became a terrorist', *Daily Telegraph*, July 18, 2009

29 Raffaello Pantucci, 'Britain jails 'lone wolf' terrorist Isa Ibrahim', *Terrorism Monitor*, vol.7, no.23, July 20, 2009; 'Jail for "suicide vest" student', BBC News, July 17, 2009; 'Bristol student pursued "relentless study in extremism"', *Bristol Evening Post*, June 9, 2009; Duncan Gardham, 'Andrew Ibrahim: How a public schoolboy became a terrorist', *Daily Telegraph*, July 18, 2009

30 In the case of Isa Ibrahim, police initially charged a friend of his who they claimed had knowledge of his plot and failed to inform them, though he was cleared at trial of any involvement or knowledge.

people with him as possible.'[31] But the same report concluded that he was likely depressed as a result of the fact that his limousine business was failing, that his family had gone to Egypt and he was alone on his birthday. It is also unclear that he specifically referred to Al Qaeda or Al Qaedist ideology in the conduct of his action, and given the fact that such shootings are relatively common in the United States, it is unclear whether he would be rightly included in the dataset of Loners within the context of this article.

More recently, the case in the United Kingdom of Roshonara Choudhry, who was convicted of attempting to murder British Member for Parliament Stephen Timms, offers an example of a Loner. As a result of watching videos by al-Qaeda theoretician Anwar al-Awlaki and through her own research online, Choudhry concluded that Mr. Timms 'very strongly agreed with the invasion of Iraq' meaning 'he was directly involved with the declaration of war, so he'd directly committed a crime.'[32] This made him a target to be 'punished' in her mind, as 'when a Muslim land is attacked it becomes obligatory on every man, woman and child and even slave to out and fight.'[33] Ms. Choudhry acted on her beliefs on May 14th, 2010, went to Mr. Timms' constituency surgery and after waiting patiently for the MP in the waiting room, stabbed him repeatedly in the stomach with a three-inch kitchen knife. She was immediately captured and confessed readily to police about what her intention was and the rationale behind it. Police interviews released to the press show clarity in her vision and purpose, with none of the confusion envisioned in the rationales offered by the others. In fact, Choudhry demonstrates a very keen awareness of the likelihood of her death, 'I wanted to be a martyr,' while also preparing for it in what would be described by violent extremists as the proper way: she cleared her debts and emptied her bank accounts prior to heading off to carry out the attack.[34]

Ms. Choudhry would appear to be different from the previous Loners, in that she was both a born Muslim and also was clearly driven by belief in the ideology offered by Al Qaeda and its theoretician Anwar al-Awlaki, an American-Yemeni preacher who is believed to currently reside in Yemen. Unlike the others, she also does not seem to be an individual who was failing in society – according to people on her course at university she was headed for a first when she dropped out, and she was also a part-time teacher at a local Muslim school.[35] This aside, she also shares a number of similarities with the others, having attempted to carry out an attack using an Al Qaedist justification by herself and with no apparent connection with any others. In intent, however, she seems purer than the others who either denied their violent Islamic justifications on the stand (Roddis) or recanted soon after being incarcerated (Ibrahim). Hedayat's rationale is harder to discern given the fact he died during the course of his action, but according to an FBI investigation they determined, 'Hedayat's religious and political beliefs were the primary motivation for the attack.'[36]

Looking briefly at these case studies, we can now begin to draw a tentative definition of the Loner category: isolated individuals who seek to carry out an act of terrorism using some form of extremist Islamist ideology as their justification. The isolated nature of the individuals means that the clear parameters of the ideology can be hard to define beyond what they claim, but clear indicators exist to show that the individuals all had imbued to some degree an ideological outlook that would accord, broadly speaking, with what can be termed as Al Qaedism.

Lone Wolf

Lone Wolves in this context are individuals who, while appearing to carry out their actions alone and without any physical outside instigation, in fact demonstrate some level of contact with operational extremists. While similar to Loners

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31 'Federal investigators: LA terrorist shooting a terrorist act', *CNN*, September 4, 2002
32 'Roshonara Choudhry: Police interview extracts', first published Guardian, November 3, 2010: http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2010/nov/03/roshonara-choudhry-police-interview
33 *Ibid.*
34 Vikram Dodd, 'Profile: Roshonara Choudhry', Guardian, November 2, 2010

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35 *Ibid.*
36 'Terrorism 2002-2005', *Federal Bureau of Investigation*, http://www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/terrorism-2002-2005

in that they act alone when operating in the real world (as opposed to the online world), close analysis demonstrates that they have some level of contact with members of a terrorist organisation and are possibly even in contact with such individuals through the internet in what can appear to be some sort of command and control structure. What is not clear, however, is whether or not the individuals are operating within a clearly defined extremist network, nor if they have a history of training in camps abroad or with known extremists. From an ideological standpoint, however, it is quite clear that the individuals within in this sub-group are persuaded of the justifications put forward by the Al Qaedist narrative, though it may also be that personal issues underlie their receptivity to such a narrative. In other words, they may be troubled individuals who seek solace in the extremist ideology – an ideology that while for the most part remains self-taught, also appears to be reinforced through online contacts with extremists.

To clarify this dataset, the author will draw separately upon three different cases, two in the United Kingdom and one in the United States, which will hopefully distinguish the unique aspects of this group: Nicky Reilly and Krenar Lusha in the United Kingdom, and Nidal Hassan Malik in the United States.

Nicky Reilly's case has many similarities with the earlier mentioned cases of Nicholas Roddis and Isa Ibrahim: a convert loner with social issues, he came from a broken home and fashioned a bomb from recipes he received through the internet and using readily available ingredients. After a period of communication with some unidentified individuals online (who were believed to be in Pakistan), on May 22, 2008, Reilly headed into central Exeter with a rucksack containing six glass bottles full of kerosene, drain cleaner, caustic soda and around 500 nails. Arriving at a chain restaurant in the city centre, he ordered a drink at the bar before heading into the toilet where he assembled and primed his device. Something went wrong, however, and he was unable to open the door to the toilet. His device exploded prematurely, leading to panic in the packed restaurant. Police and emergency services arrived to find a blood covered Reilly openly admitting and justifying his actions.

Uncertain of exactly what had occurred, police were only able to confirm their initial impression the following day when they quizzed Reilly again and he stated clearly that he was acting 'in retaliation for the oppression of Muslims around the world and in relation to world events of recent years.'[37] Further investigation showed that he had radicalised over an unspecified period of time after he had been in contact with individuals who found him through his YouTube channel. They apparently helped push him towards carrying out the attempted attack and advised him on how to construct a bomb. Police initially thought that he had some contact with extremists in Plymouth and two individuals were arrested in a dramatic raid in the days following his arrest. Both were cleared of terrorism charges, though one faced charges of using a fake passport. Reilly had apparently converted to Islam in 2002 or 2003, and changed his name to Mohammed Abdulaziz Rashid Saeed-Alim (the name he was charged under), in 2007. At his home, considerable volumes of extremist material were found, including a suicide note in which he claimed responsibility for his actions and quoted 'Sheikh Osama bin Laden.'[38]

In the second case, that of Muslim Albanian immigrant Krenar Lusha, it is less clear whether there was any outside command and control or influence, though there are indicators suggestive that there may have been. Krenar Lusha was part of a group of five suspected radicals arrested in the United Kingdom following an investigation into a death threat made online against Prime Minister Gordon Brown by a group calling themselves 'Al Qaeda in Britain.' While they were charged in different cases, they all appear to have been involved in the same website which was frequented by English-speaking radicals. The police were alerted to Lusha as they trawled through the main target of that investigation's computer and phone records and discovered he had been involved in long and ominous sounding conversations with someone they identified as Lusha. Though there is no evidence that the men met in person,

37   Chris Greenwood and Tom Palmer, 'Muslim convert "intended to martyr" himself ', *Press Association*, October 15, 2008
38   Chris Greenwood and Shenai Raif, 'Muslim convert admits trying to kill dozens in restaurant', *Press Association*, October 15, 2008; John-Paul Ford Rojas, 'Restaurant bomber jailed for life', Press Association, January 30, 2009

it seems as though the contacts were enough to concern police.[39]

It is unclear what exactly Lusha was planning. When police searched his property on August 26, 2008, they found substantial amounts of online radical material (he was in the midst of downloading some as they came crashing through the door), including videos and files showing how to make mobile phone detonators, suicide vests and other terrorist devices. He also had in his possession 71 litres of petrol, 2 kilograms of potassium nitrate fertiliser and 14 mobile phones: Lusha claimed the potassium nitrate was not his, and that he was stockpiling the fuel in case of a shortage. As for the phones, he told police that he had simply begun collecting them and enjoyed the ease with which he could obtain such commodities in the United Kingdom. A failed asylum seeker who had been smuggled into the UK in the back of a lorry, Lusha had managed to find a job at a local plastics factory where co-workers described him as a jovial individual. A local bank even found him of credible enough character to guarantee him a £93,400 loan. All of this suggests that he was a relatively assimilated individual who nonetheless in his spare time would boast to women online of his exploits as a Jew and American hating sniper and terrorist. This is in addition to his online exploits as part of a community of 'jihobbyists'[40] who gather in online chat rooms to share files and discuss their support for extremists – increasingly environments in which real-world extremists gather. The conclusion would seem to be that Lusha was likely operating alone within an immediate context, but was in contact with other extremists both on and off-line (though maybe only by telephone).[41]

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39   Shaun Jepson, 'Videos of explosions and assassinations of soldiers shown at trial', *Derby Evening Telegraph*, November 19, 2009; Sarah North, 'How Al Qaeda obsession led police to "lone wolf" suspect', *Derby Evening Telegraph*, May 11, 2010

40   Jarret Brachman first coined this term in *Global Jihadism: Theory and Practice* (Routledge, 2008). He describes it as an individual who emerges 'without direct assistance, training or support from any official al-Qaeda element.'

41   For more on the phenomenon of the fusion of real-world and online jihadism, please see: Raffaello Pantucci, 'Operation Praline: the realization of Al-Suri's *nizam, la tanzim?', Perspectives on Terrorism*, vol.2, no.2, October 2008; Jarret Brachman, 'Al Qaeda's Armies of One', *Foreign Policy*, January 22, 2010; and Evan Kohlmann's substantial body of work on the topic.

The most successful case of a Lone Wolf so far is that of Nidal Malik Hassan, the U.S. Army officer who went on a rampage on November 5, 2009 and killed 12 fellow soldiers and one civilian (and injuring a further 30 people) before being gunned down himself. Hassan's rationale behind his action has not yet been completely established, though the indications are that as an army psychologist he had been traumatised by stories he had heard from returning soldiers and did not want to be posted abroad. However, it has also been revealed that he had been in regular email contact with Anwar al-Awlaki. The two met when Hassan attended Awlaki's sermons sometime during the period in 2000-2002 when Awlaki was the imam at the Dar al-Hijrah mosque in Falls Church, Virginia. Though it remains unclear what role Awlaki had in Hassan's decision to carry out his terrorist action, the clear contact between the two men suggests that Hassan was at the very least operating in contact with extremists and thus may have been more than simply a loner fantasist making up his version of extremism as he went along. Awlaki was quick to praise Hassan on his blog in the wake of his attack, though this of course demonstrates little about command and control links.

Similarities to the previous group can be drawn from the fact that both Hassan and Reilly appear to have demonstrated some level of mental illness: Reilly was a sufferer of Asperger's syndrome and was described by his own lawyer as being 'the least cunning person ever to have come before this court for any offence of this magnitude.'[42] While it is still unclear exactly what the reasons were behind Hassan's action, with some speculating that mental stress may have been a factor.[43] Lusha, on the other hand, appears to have been quite well respected amongst his local community and was apparently popular amongst his co-workers – in many ways similar to Roshonara Choudhry, who displayed no evidence of mental illness prior to her action and who was seemingly a well adjusted member of society. Also similar to the previous group, all three men

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42   Shenai Raif and John-Paul Ford Rojas, 'Restaurant bomber "lacked cunning" ', Press Association, November 21, 2008

43   'Fort Hood suspect Nidal Malik Hassan seemed "cool, calm, religious" ', *CNN*, November 7, 2009, available at: http://edition.cnn.com/2009/CRIME/11/06/fort.hood.suspect/index.html

demonstrated some level of absorption of the Al Qaedist narrative: Reilly's own suicide note highlights his support for Osama bin Laden as well as his contact with other radicals online; Malik's regular contact with Awlaki suggest that he was at the very least interested in the radical preacher's message; and while Lusha's boastful comments to women online about his imagined exploits as a terrorist may have been hot air, his voluminous collection of extremist material and contacts with other extremists demonstrate a more than passing interest in the topic. In this way we can see that all three men fulfil the basic criteria for inclusion within the overarching dataset, as they ascribe to the Al Qaedist ideology, while also attempting to carry out terrorist plots alone.

But these three cases distinguish themselves from that of Nicholas Roddis and Isa Ibrahim (and Hesham Mohammed Ali Hedayat) in that they appear to have been carried out by individuals who had some level of contact with extremists who may have played some role in driving their decisions towards either carrying out acts of terrorism, as in the case of Reilly and Malik, or appearing to prepare for them, as in the case of Lusha. The case of Roshonara Choudhry is harder to distinguish at this point, as the entire story may not have yet been told, but she claims to have had no contact with others and police have not suggested otherwise.[44] They therefore demonstrate the key differential between themselves and the previous group: that they were individuals whose activities were conducted alone, but were in actual contact with other extremists.

Lone Wolf Pack

The principle behind the Lone Wolf Pack is one that is similar to the Lone Wolves, except rather than there being a single individual who becomes ideologically motivated; it is a group of individuals who self-radicalise using the Al Qaeda

narrative. This subset is in many ways the definition of analyst Dr Marc Sageman's 'bunch of guys' theory, by which groups form, radicalise and then seek to join the jihad. As Sageman describes the process,

social affiliation with the jihad accomplished through friendship, kinship, and disciplineship; progressive intensification of beliefs and faith leading to acceptance of the global Salafi jihadi ideology; and formal acceptance to the jihad through the encounter of a link to the jihad.[45]

What distinguishes this group from the broader community of Islamist terrorists, however, is that they have not made the final step of making contact with operational extremists or if they have it is not in a way to further immediate operational goals. This means that they remain within the confines of the broader community of loner terrorists, since they lack a formal connection to either Al Qaeda core or one of its affiliates. While they might demonstrate some form of contact, it tends to be limited and demonstrates no particular command and control features. Instead, they appear to be a small group of similarly minded individuals who choose to engage together in an act of terrorism that they justify under the banner of Al Qaedist ideology. Their connection to actual extremists might simply be the product of there being more than one (suggesting some level of socialisation) and thus increasing the odds that they have had some interaction with active extremists.

Three case studies are offered to highlight the distinguishing features of this group: Mohammed Game, Abdelaziz Mahmoud Kol and Imbaeya Israfel, who were found guilty of plotting to attack a military base in Milan (Game attempted to blow himself up outside the barracks); Jihad Hamad and Youssef el Hajdib, who left bag bombs on trains in Cologne; and the so-called Fort Dix plotters who were conspiring in New Jersey to carry out an attack on a local military base.

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44   During her police interviews, she repeatedly refers to 'brothers and sisters' she talks to about things, but did not implicate anyone. She was also active on the www.revolutionmuslim.com website, though it is unclear she was actually communicating with people there, rather than simply being a passive reader.

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45   Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), p.135

A Libyan migrant living in Milan, 34-year old Mohammed Game was married to an Italian woman and had a number of children. On October 12, 2009 he attempted to launch a suicide terrorist attack on the Santa Barbara Army barracks in Milan.[46] When challenged by a guard as he approached the gates of the barracks, he detonated an explosive device fashioned in a tool box he was carrying. Fortunately, the device failed to explode properly, only slightly injuring the guard who had challenged him; leaving Game the most seriously injured, losing his sight in one eye and the better part of an arm. The attack took Italian forces completely by surprise, and they rapidly launched an operation to understand where this apparent Lone Wolf attacker had come from. However, while the ensuing investigation turned up an apparent support cell, it remained unclear at the time of writing that the group was in fact connected in any serious way to Al Qaeda core or any of its allies. Two more men, Egyptian Abdel Hady Abdelaziz Mahmud Kol and Libyan Muhammad Imbaeya Israfel, were arrested in the days immediately following the attempt on suspicion of involvement with the plot, while a fourth Moroccan man was picked up and deported.

It is perhaps too early to conclude that the group was completely independent, with official reports stating that there was evidence at the 'bomb factory' flat that a number of others were possibly in the cell's orbit.[47] Similarly, extremist forums quickly praised the action and Game was apparently a regular at a known extremist Mosque in Viale Jenner.[48] But nonetheless, these contacts might be explained by the fact that immigrants in foreign countries tend to gravitate towards each other, and the fact that initially it appeared as though Game's attack might have actually caused some casualties. This might have led some eager extremist forum participants to praise a successful attack in an attempt to claim it without necessarily having any contact with it. Consequently, there is limited evidence of strong connections to outside networks

of extremists, suggesting the possibility that the group has the attributes of a Lone Wolf Pack.

The second case study is that of Jihad Hamad and Youssef el Hajdib who on July 31, 2006 deposited two suitcase bombs on regional trains at Cologne's main train station. The two young Lebanese men were previously unknown to the security services in Germany and close examination of the evidence around them appears to suggest that they were not in direct contact with extremists. That the attack did not succeed appears to be the first clear indicator that the men did not receive any expert advice or training from operational extremists: the devices had been properly constructed, but an incorrect gas was used, rendering them harmless. Nevertheless, prosecutors described Germany as having 'never stood closer to an Islamist attack,' and the two men were convicted to long prison sentences for their activities.[49]

Upon discovery of the plot, German authorities immediately assumed that Hamad and Hajdib were part of a coordinated Al Qaeda cell – other individuals loosely linked to the pair were swept up and it was noted that Hamad's father was an active Hizb ut Tahrir member in Lebanon. Over time, however, they retracted this initial analysis as they noted the generally amateurish manner in which the plotters operated: not only was the device fashioned (incorrectly) based on information obtained from an extremist website, but when fleeing they used their own passports and left all manner of evidence leading the authorities directly to them.[50] Over time, the theory was in fact developed that the men may have attempted to carry out the attack as part of an effort to show their value to the extremist group Al Qaeda in Iraq and thus permit them to go and join the fighters in Iraq.[51] Some elements in their personal histories suggest contact with extremists, for example Hajdib spent some time living in a

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46   The Carabinieri are an Italian paramilitary police force who have seen numerous recent deployments in Afghanistan and Iraq.
47   Gianni Santucci, 'Un covo anonimo "La nuova strategia? Terroristi senza saperlo"; Via Gulli', *Corriere della Sera*, October 20, 2009
48   'Game in coma, slitta interrogatorio: E intanto spunta una foto al Ciak', *Corriere della Sera*, October 15, 2009

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49   Nicholas Kulish, 'Life sentence for failed bomb attempt in Germany', *New York Times*, December 10, 2008
50   Gunther Latsch, Guido Kleinhubbert, Cordula Meyer, Holger Stark, Daniel Steinvorth, Andreas Ulrich, and Marc Widmann, 'Terrorism in Germany: Every investigator's nightmare', *Der Spiegel*, July 28, 2006
51   Andreas Ulrich, 'Failed bomb plot seen as Al Qaida initiation test', *Der Spiegel*, April 9, 2007

centre linked to the Al Nur mosque in Hamburg, which German authorities believe is a locus for extremists, and was also quite outspoken and active with protesters who took to the streets in response to the Danish cartoons crisis. Similarly, an acquaintance of Hamad's was a suspected member of an Al Tawhid cell in Germany and as was previously highlighted, his father was a member of Hizb ut Tahrir.[52] Nevertheless, while this might demonstrate some level of connection, much of it can be ascribed to simply being part of an interconnected immigrant community and it is unclear that there was any direct command and control or relevant training – all of which supports the analytical conclusion that the men were part of a Lone Wolf Pack.

The final example of a Lone Wolf Pack that is offered is the case of the so-called Fort Dix plotters, who in May 2007 were arrested by the FBI. The investigation into their activities followed a tip off to authorities after they attempted to get some DVDs made which appeared to show terrorist training. The FBI followed up the lead with an intensive investigation into the group, which included infiltrating at least one confidential informant into the group with one other becoming involved at a later stage in the investigation. The group was made up of three brothers, Eljvir, Dritan and Shain Duka, as well as Mohammed Ibrahim Shnewer, Serdar Tatar, and Agron Abdullahu – the Duka's and Abdullahu are all ethnic Albanians born in the former Yugoslavia, while Shnewer is Jordanian and Tatar of Turkish extraction. Eljvir and Dritan Duka appear to have been the key instigators behind the plot, and at some point claimed that they wanted to go abroad to train. However, at no point was evidence uncovered that the men had direct connections to extremists.

Instead, the evidence provided by the FBI subsequent to the investigation appeared to show the men plotting to train in the nearby Poconos mountains, collecting an assortment of weaponry with which they planned to launch some sort of attack upon a military base at Fort Dix. One of the men, Serdar Tatar, was able to obtain a map of the Fort Dix area, which he passed on to the group on the understanding that

it was likely to be used in some sort of terrorist attack.[53] The men were active online, participating in extremist forums and collecting substantial volumes of radical material, but it does not appear through these connections that they were also receiving external direction.[54]

Thus we can see the distinct parameters of the Lone Wolf Pack subset: in all cases, some level of outside communication was apparent (mostly through the internet), but at no point does it appear clear that the plotters were subject to the direction of outside forces. Their respective plots appear to have been hatched in the hothouses of their own minds and the dynamics of their small group. In all cases, substantial steps were taken towards an actual terrorist attack, with incompetence fortunately hindering the two plots that matured to the attack phase. One could likely describe inept operational security as the incompetence that foiled the third plot, but the heavy sentences handed down show the viability in a judge's mind of what was being planned.[55] Game's group was clearly an independent cell operating in a radical environment, and the discovery precipitated a high level of concern amongst Italian security forces about the presence of similar cells. Other potential Lone Wolf Packs were disrupted, including a cell of students in Perugia who were allegedly overheard talking about assassinating the Pope and a pair of Moroccan laborers north of Milan who were described as being like Game's cell at an earlier phase. In the first case, the group was rapidly deported, while the second pair are currently on trial.

Lone Attackers

The final group offered within this dataset is that of the Lone Attackers – these are individuals who operate alone, but demonstrate clear command and control links with actual Al

53   Detail on the Fort Dix plotters is drawn from the official FBI complaint: USA vs. Dritan Duka, May 7, 2007

54   Evan Kohlmann, 'A web of Lone Wolves', *Foreign Policy,* November 13, 2009

55   'Five Radical Islamists convicted of conspiring to kill soldiers at Fort Dix', Department of Justice Press Release, December 22, 2008, http://www.justice. gov/opa/pr/2008/December/08-nsd-1142.html

Qaeda core or affiliated groups. Unlike the Lone Wolves or Lone Wolf Packs group, these individuals have contact with active extremists, rather than loose online connections or aspirational contacts. The individuals have clearly imbued the Al Qaedist narrative and are actively involved in networks that provide them with actual explosive devices or weaponry that permit them to attempt to carry out a terrorist attack. In many ways, their inclusion within the context of this article can appear to be pointless, given the fact that they are clearly not loners in anything except their final action – in other words, they are in fact simply one-man terror cells dispatched by terror groups. Their inclusion, however, is intended to highlight the distinction between such small terror cells and the broader community of Lone Wolves this article is attempting to define.

While there are many examples to choose from, Richard Reid and Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab are highlighted as case studies as they evince all the characteristics of a lone attacker, and also demonstrate some similarities with the previous groups.

Richard Reid's path to jihad appears to have started during his time in prison as a young man on charges of petty crime. Having initially found Islam as a possible answer to problems that had led him to a life of crime, he quickly appears to have been drawn down the path of radical Islam by individuals he met amongst the community of South London Muslims. From here, he was drawn into the wide network of extremists around Abu Hamza's Finsbury Park mosque from where he was able to establish contact with Al Qaeda core and he then received an invitation letter to go and train in Afghanistan. After a period of transnational travelling which remains unexplained, he returned to Afghanistan after September 11, 2001 where he was issued with a device that would get past airport security. Returning to Europe, he operated through extremist networks in Brussels and Paris, whilst there he obtained a new passport and bought a one-way ticket from Paris to Miami. Others boarding the plane alongside him on December 22, 2001 later expressed some concerns about his behaviour (he was muttering to himself and jumping up and down), but he was nonetheless allowed on and able to attempt detonation of the device that he had

concealed within his shoe. Fortunately for the passengers of American Airlines flight 63, alert aircrew were able to stop him before he could light his detonator and he was instead arrested when the plane landed prematurely in Boston. It was later discovered that Reid was meant to be carrying out his action in conjunction with Saajid Badat, a British born Muslim who had received the same equipment as Reid, but chose instead to back out. Nonetheless, Reid's intention was to carry out his action alone, without any immediate support.[56]

Almost eight years to the day, on December 25, 2009, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab attempted something very similar to Richard Reid when he boarded a flight from Amsterdam to Detroit. Born in Nigeria, Abdulmutallab comes from a prosperous family who had enough money to send him to be educated at University College London and put him up in one of London's most affluent neighbourhoods. His radicalisation trajectory is unclear, though it seems as though he skirted on the fringes of extremist networks while he was in London and following his time there, travelled to Yemen where it is believed he made contact with Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and trained in their camps. Like Nidal Malik Hassan, Abdulmutallab appears to have been in contact with Anwar al-Awlaki though it is unclear what kind of a role he may have played in the young man's radicalisation. According to reports in the press, it was after the revelations around Awlaki's involvement with Abdulmutallab that the CIA decided to add him to the list of individuals who are approved for targeted assassination.[57] Nevertheless, by the time Abdulmutallab set off on his journey on December 24, 2009, he was a ready and willing martyr, eager to bring down an airplane full of infidels in aid of the cause he believed in. While some reports claim that he may have been spotted with another individual as he started his journey, it appears as though he attempted to carry out his action alone.

Both men were radicalised in the West, with London appearing to be a backdrop for some portion of their

56   This account is largely drawn from Sean O'Neill and Daniel McGrory, *The Suicide Factory*, (London: HarperCollins, 2006).
57   Adam Entous, 'U.S. targets American-born cleric in Yemen: officials', *Reuters*, April 6, 2010

ideological conversion to violent Islamist terrorism. Abdulmutallab appears to have been a quite stable young man, while Richard Reid seems to have been a troubled youth who drifted towards extremism as an answer to an absence he found in his life. This is similar to the previous group of loners where they were both misfits, but also relatively well-adjusted individuals. Finally, both men attempted to carry out their terrorist attacks alone, though there is clear evidence of a support network of extremists behind them – including connections to Al Qaeda (Reid) and Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (Abdulmutallab). The point is that while in their final actions and backgrounds, the men share much with the previously mentioned plots. In practice, they are distinct from this group in that they were actually in direct contact with extremists who radicalised them, trained them, and then dispatched them to a specific target.

Effectiveness?

At this point it is useful to take this preliminary typology and draw some analytical and operational conclusions. A first useful point of analysis is to observe which of the groups has proved to be most effective in achieving a terrorist goal. When looking at the limited community included in this article, it would seem as though the unaffiliated groups (Loner, Lone Wolf and Lone Wolf Pack) were the most effective: in six out of twelve cases cited the plots were carried through to the implementation phase, though in two cases the devices exploded prematurely or ineffectively (Nicky Reilly and Mohammed Game), while in a third case (the Cologne pair), the devices failed to explode. Roshonara Choudhry's effort with a knife is similar to Reilly's in many ways, in that the correct weaponry was there, but there was a failure in delivering a fatal delivery. The two lone American shooters: Nidal Malik Hassan and Hesham Mohammed Ali Hedayat are the only three included in this dataset who actually managed to kill individuals in pursuit of their Lone Wolf attack. At this point, however, it is necessary to clarify the potential importance of the fact that when one looks at the broader community of Loners there are many more successful individual shooters who carry out attacks than effective terrorist attacks, particularly in the United States. The

statistical analytical impact of the ready availability of weaponry in the United States has not been factored into analysis and thus may be warping the conclusions.

However, when we look to effectiveness it would be expected that the individuals who had deepest command and control contact with active violent extremists would be those who would be able to carry out effective terrorist strikes. Instead we can see from the perspective of effectiveness, there is little to distinguish between Richard Reid, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, Nicky Reilly, and the Cologne train bombers. All were able to take viable devices to targets, but in all of the cases, some final operational hiccup prevented them from properly detonating.

If we expand the dataset out to include another Lone Wolf: Abdulhakim Mujahid Mohammed, who appears to have espoused some degree of jihadist ideology post-facto, and who carried out an attack on an American military target using a machine gun, we can see that it is maybe the case that lone attackers using guns rather than bombs are more effective, something supported by earlier comments in this paper about Loners.[58] This would make sense in a practical way: it is clearly much easier to kill fellow humans using a gun than it is to fashion an explosive device which is by its very nature volatile and requires a technical ability which is not best transmitted via the internet. Two Italian cases which have not been gone into in great detail here, that of Jordanian Mohammed al Khatib and Moroccan Moustafa Chaouki, who separately (and unconnected) tried to blow themselves up in car bombs outside a synagogue and a McDonald's respectively, highlight the difficulty of making effective bombs. In both cases, it was only the bombers who suffered, though it is unclear how the men

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58   Arrested after opening fire with a submachine gun on a military recruiting center in Little Rock, Arkansas, he was not included earlier, as he appears to mostly have claimed his connection to Al Qaedism post-fact. Primarily in a letter he sent to the judge in his case claiming membership of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula – there is other ancillary evidence pointing to a possible contact with extremism (he lived in Yemen for a while and he was apparently angry about U.S. involvement in wars in the Muslim world), it is not nearly as conclusive as the evidence offered in the other cases in this paper. James Dao, 'A Muslim son, a murder trial and many questions', *New York Times*, February 16, 2010

learned how to build the devices they attempted to detonate.[59]

The Internet

Sageman is quite explicit in stating that 'the internet can encourage another special case, namely loners,'[60] and he raises a point which has not yet been looked at in any great detail in this paper: the question around the role of the internet as an incubator or accelerator of the Lone Wolf phenomenon. The internet is clearly the running theme between most of the plots included in this dataset and it appears to be a very effective tool: it provides a locus in which they can obtain radicalising material, training manuals and videos. It provides them with direct access to a community of like-minded individuals around the world with whom they can connect and in some cases can provide them with further instigation and direction to carry out activities. Many of the individuals in the dataset demonstrate some level of social alienation – within this context the community provided by the internet can act as a replacement social environment that they are unable to locate in the real world around them.

But can the internet thus be blamed for the creation of this community of individuals? This seems like a premature conclusion to reach: in the first instance there is no way of knowing what these people would have done were it not for the internet; and second, the ubiquity of the internet means it is a hypothetical that is essentially impossible to imagine. In other words, to recreate a test environment in which the internet does not exist – and therefore is not a factor – would be impossible to do given the pervasive global presence of the web. What instead might be suggested is that the internet now means that it is much easier for any alienated loner to make contact or locate a high level of both radical material, and operational support material through it. In addition to this it is necessary to emphasise the high profile that Al Qaeda has achieved in the post-September 11, 2001 world – all of which supports the theory that online Al Qaedism might simply be the brightest flame that is attracting alienated loners.

Proving this in a scientifically satisfactory fashion is almost impossible. In the first instance, it would be very hard to identify a control group to compare the radical group against. Secondly, it is difficult to truly know how much a person's psychological outlook is formed solely by material they found online – as opposed to other influences such as television, or their interpersonal relationships. It is probably easier to conclude that they were able to find operational material online, while evidence of where they got their ideas for their explosive devices or plots can be found amongst the wealth of material they had gathered from the internet.

Mental Competence?

Another open question that is raised by this limited community of individuals is the importance of weakened mental faculties in leaving an individual prone to becoming a Lone Wolf. As we can see, mental problems or a general social inability underlie the histories of many of the lone individuals mentioned in this article. Krenar Lusha, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab and Roshonara Choudhry appear to be the only individuals who demonstrated a relatively high level of socialisation into the communities around them. But even this is hard to definitely state: in Lusha's case, his online personality appears to have diverged somewhat from the persona the world around him saw. Similarly, while Ms. Choudhry may have chosen an extremely divergent path, her life up to her attempted attack appears to have been a model career trajectory for a young woman living in London. When taken in conjunction with the previous assertion that Al Qaedism may have become the brightest online flame that attracts alienated loners, we are presented with a possible conclusion that the entire phenomenon of Lone Wolves may

59 For more on al Khatib: 'Modena, scoppia auto vicino alla sinagoga', La Repubblica, December 11, 2003; and for more on Chaouki, 'Marocchino si fa esplodere vicino a un McDonald's', *La Repubblica*, March 29, 2004

60 Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), p.122 – it is also necessary to highlight that Sageman is not using the term Loner in the same tightly defined context that the author has within this text.

in fact be nothing more than a transient issue which has been fostered by the heightened availability of Al Qaedist ideology online. The loners attracted to it now may in 20 years time (or whatever period of time it takes for the phenomenon of Al Qaedism to lose its glamour), be attracted to another ideology which has yet to emerge in any substantial fashion. Thus we need not concern ourselves unduly with the current phenomenon, as it is merely the current incarnation of a perennial problem.

But while this conclusion may capture the response necessary: that the problem of Lone Wolves, like the more general problem of violent Islamist extremism, is one that is more properly managed than completely stamped out, it oversimplifies the specific phenomenon of Lone Wolves as enunciated in this article. Quite aside from sidestepping the phenomenon of Lone Wolf Packs, it also misses the growing feature of the internet as a surrogate command and control network. In both the cases of Nidal Hassan Malik and Nicky Reilly, it would appear as though voices they encountered through the internet were able to help push them towards carrying out actual terrorist activity. Similarly, even if we consider the cases of Isa Ibrahim and Nicholas Roddis as misguided youths who found solace in Islamist extremism they found online – in both cases, they were able to start quite decisively down a path that could have led them to killing or maiming unknown numbers of individuals in their immediate communities. The case of Roshonara Choudhry shows this point taken to its next extreme, when an individual is able to radicalise to the point of using primarily online materials and then attempt a public assassination.

Conclusions

Before proceeding towards some concluding remarks, it is necessary to at least mention the case of Faisal Shahzad, the young Pakistani-American who on May 1st, 2010 left a vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) in the middle of Times Square in New York. Seized as he tried to flee the country a few days later, Shahzad's story is still being unravelled by investigators making any conclusive comments

almost impossible to draw. However, based on statements being released by the Department of Justice and apparently based on confessions made by Shahzad, it would appear as though he carried out his action alone, he was an acolyte of extremist preachers like Abdullah el-Faisal and Anwar al-Awlaki, and that he had spent some time in Waziristan training camps under the tutelage of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (the Pakistani Taliban affiliate). According to U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder, 'we know that they helped facilitate it; we know that they helped direct it,'[61] but it still seems as though Shahzad was operating by himself, with many of those immediately arrested in his wake released or held on unrelated charges. Currently he appears to fit the broad criteria laid out in this article of being a Lone Attacker rather than a Lone Wolf.

Shahzad's case nevertheless highlights once again the importance of better understanding the role of Lone Wolf terrorism in the current matrix of threat, and how deeper analysis is clearly needed to try to understand it better. It is worth highlighting once again that this article is intended as a preliminary analysis to provide some framework through which the phenomenon of Lone Wolves espousing a violent Islamist ideology might be observed with some greater degree of clarity. This is important given the apparent increasing prevalence of both Lone Wolves claiming to have been persuaded by the violent Islamist creed, but also to understand the phenomenon of Lone Wolves more generally – including, in due course, those who appear persuaded by other ideologies (like right-wing extremism, extreme environmentalism or other forms of religious fundamentalism – whom have all been purposely omitted from the article). Future research might pry into comparisons between these groups or seeing if the typology offered here holds for these other communities, or how it compares to the broader community of lone individuals who take up weapons against their fellow citizens.

To return to the Islamist context, it is an important phenomenon to understand better given the strategic outlooks espoused by influential ideologues like Abu Musab

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61   Holder: Pakistani Taliban behind NYC bomb', *Associated Press*, May 9, 2010

al-Suri and Anwar al-Awlaki, both of whom advocate small cells taking up action wherever they are able to in furtherance of Al Qaeda's more general global ambitions.[62] As was outlined at the beginning, it seems as though this is a phenomenon that bears close attention given the growing references to it amongst Al Qaeda or affiliate leaders. The first issue in 2011 of AQAP's Inspire magazine attempted to claim a series of Lone Wolves as individuals who were ascribing to their notion of 'borderless loyalty,' though it is unclear if they were in any way connected to either of the plotters referred to. This attempted post-facto co-opting demonstrates an interest on the part of such groups to somehow shape and manage the phenomenon of Lone Wolves and it is unclear at this point whether they have managed to find a way to do this. It is possible that over time and through deeper research this conclusion might be better supported or discounted.

Deeper research on this topic might also demonstrate that the four groups that have been identified are in fact not as separate as the author has thus concluded. A larger and more detailed dataset might show how in fact the connections to extremists which appear to distinguish groups are details which have only come to light as a result of deeper police and public investigation since plots matured to such advanced stages. The rationale behind the author's decision to distinguish at this point, however, is borne of a belief that in fact there is something important within the distinction, though clearly more research is needed to validate this assertion.

Further avenues for deeper research are offered within the context of expanding the dataset to include more broadly the wide array of small plots that have taken place across Europe and that have attracted little attention due to their ineffective nature, or a general overload of the public consciousness about such actions. A larger dataset might also clarify the length of time it takes different Lone Wolves to move from being peripheral extremists to dangerous terrorists. It might also help create some sort of scale of the actual threat from

such individuals and whether the public at large can be more carefully attuned to noticing individuals who have fallen off the radar.

In this early phase of conclusions, the primary intention of this paper is to try to cast a preliminary analytical eye onto the troublesome question of Lone Wolf extremists within an extreme Islamist context. The issue is one that is frequently disregarded at an analytical level due to the apparent complexity and confusion that the subject poses, and a preference to focus on threats that emanate from clear networks with connections abroad. But at the same time, they are frequently referred to as a major potential terrorist threat, with both CIA Director Leon Panetta and FBI Director Robert Mueller referring to them as a threat.[63] Furthermore, there is some evidence that networks abroad are eager to focus on Lone Wolves as a tactical tool to attack the West. The hope is that the typology offered in this paper will start to open the subject up to closer scrutiny and focus on this potentially dangerous expression of terrorism.

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62 For more on Al-Suri, please see Bryjar Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad*, (London: Hurst & Co., 2007); for more on Awlaki, please see Evan Kohlmann, *Op. Cit.*, or Anwar al-Awlaki, 'Constants in the path of jihad.'

63 For Mueller comments, please see, 'War on Terrorism', Testimony of Robert S. Mueller, III, Director FBI, Before the Select Committee on Intelligence of the United States Senate, Washington, February 11, 2003. Accessed: http://www. fbi.gov/congress/congress03/mueller021103.htm ; for Panetta comments, 'Intelligence officials warn attempted Al Qaeda attack months away', *FOX News*, February 10, 2010

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