
THE RISE OF LONE WOLF TERRORISM- NEW CHALLENGE TO MEDIA

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Abstract: Today, one of the most challenging and unpredictable forms of terrorism are violent terror acts committed by single individuals, often referred to as lone wolf terrorists or lone actor terrorists. One of the major problems with detecting possible lone wolf terrorists is that there is no consistent or typical profile. Lone wolf terrorists pose a large threat to modern society. The purpose of this paper will be focused on one of the most unpredictable forms of terrorism acts—those committed by a single individual, a so-called "lone wolf terrorist". The phenomenon of so-called lone wolf terrorism has increased with more and more attacks perpetrated by single actors. The shifting nature of terrorism has prompted a debate over how to accurately describe individuals that act independently of a terrorist organization's chain of command. Lone-wolf terrorists' acts are not only meant to inflict pain and death but also to spread terror and fear. They commit these crimes to catch the attention of the public and indeed of the state. Their expectations are that terrorising nations will create pressure from the public and force states to amend their policies and subsequently meet their demands. The concept of the lone wolf terrorist is increasingly common in recent decades, often attracting media attention as a "new" and "dangerous" threat. Live television news events have been dominated by incidences involving lone-wolf terrorist attacks recently. This has presented new challenges to the broadcast news media. It is a growing phenomenon, but research on this topic has been accompanied by major shortcomings, because this type of violence may be one of the most mysterious and unforeseeable forms of terrorism. Therefore, the lone wolf concept needs to be reevaluated and adapted to changed circumstances. The current ability to identify and stop these kind of terrorists before they commit a terror act is limited since they are very hard to detect using traditional methods. However, these individuals often make use of Internet to spread their beliefs and opinions, and to obtain information and knowledge to plan an attack. Lone wolf terrorism has been considered as a serious threat to public security in recent years and an extremely difficult challenge for security—they are relatively unpredictable, undetectable and effectively unstoppable. The unique features of lone-actor terrorism, including the challenges of interdiction and potential of copycat attacks, mean that the media is likely to play a particularly important role in shaping the reactions of the public, affected communities and copycat attackers. Furthermore, socioeconomic approaches need to be adopted to tackle the phenomenon of terrorism from the roots because policing and counterterrorism operations alone have proven to be insufficient. It means displaying interest, respect and appreciation for others' linguistic, cultural and religious traditions. Currently, there are more questions than answers on the content and validity of the lone wolf concept, but we should be alert and aware that the external conditions have changed, and old responses may not be appropriate anymore to present-day lone actor terrorism

Keywords: lone wolf terrorist, terrorist violence, media, communication, coverage.

1. INTRODUCTION/DEFINING THE CONCEPT

Lone wolf terrorists are risking life and liberty for their cause. Why would any individual take this kind of risk? More generally, why would any individual choose to sacrifice for a cause?

Some experts use an expansive definition of lone wolf terrorism in terms of both motives and the number of perpetrators involved. Jeffrey Simon²⁷, defines the crime as the use of violence against the government, society, business, or the military by an individual acting alone "or with minimal support from one or two other people" in support of political, social or financial goals. This definition includes what Simon calls the "criminal lone wolf" or "those who perpetrate their violence for purely personal or financial gain."

²⁷Simon, J.D.(2013). *Lone Wolf Terrorism: Understanding the Growing Threat*. Prometheus Books.

Whereas “hate crime” refers to a range of both violent and nonviolent offenses that are committed due to the perpetrator’s prejudice against a particular group represented by the victim, terrorism is a violent act intended exclusively to coerce a government or a civilian population in the furtherance of political or social objectives.²⁸

Paul Gill²⁹ considering three categories:

1. individual terrorists who train alone and select their own targets;
2. individuals who received training from terrorist organizations and were given targets for an attack;
3. and couples who may have radicalized each other, but who received no external direction.

Arguably, if two or three people carry out an act of terrorism, then it is no longer a “lone” act committed by an “unaffiliated” individual since there were multiple perpetrators who were at least affiliated with one another. The other issue relates to violent radicalization. In cases of lone wolf terrorism, an aggrieved individual typically becomes radicalized within his or her own attainable means, such as violent media imagery, online sermons and political screeds, or personal veneration of terrorists who came before.³⁰

2. THE MEDIA AS A WEAPON

For terrorist, information can be wielded as a weapon of war, making media as a weapon an important concept. Because symbolism is at the center of most terrorist incidents, terrorists as potential supplements to their arsenal explicitly identify the media. When terrorists successfully and violently manipulate important symbols, relatively weak movements can influence governments and societies. Even when a terrorist unit fails to complete its mission, intensive media exposure can lead to a propaganda victory.³¹

This chapter summarizes the current understanding of factors influencing the decisions of media outlets to devote attention to terrorist attack and discusses how such coverage influences potential sympathizers and supporters.

First, the fact that most terrorist attacks receive no or little media attention suggests that terrorist groups vary substantially in their ability to design attacks to garner media attention. It is not easy for terrorists to manipulate the media coverage they receive. Knowledge of why some terrorist attacks succeed and others fail to attract media attention could provide important insights into the political goals, media perceptiveness, and organizational capacity of the perpetrators. However, terrorist attacks vary widely for attention they receive. Most terrorist attacks receive no attention from major media outlets. Others, such as those in New York and Washington, DC, in 2001, London in 2005, and Mumbai in 2008, received heavy coverage.³²

Second, a better understanding of the motivations of and constraints facing media outlets could inform the design of media relations and public diplomacy strategies of agencies responsible for counterterrorism. This coverage can provide terrorists with a vehicle for conveying their political messages to mass audiences, and it can distract from public understanding of the difficulty of preventing terrorist attacks and the steps that the authorities take to achieve this objective. Research in this area has begun to explore, in a systematic manner, the conditions under which the media are more or less likely to devote considerable coverage to terrorist attacks rather than other topics or other aspects of counterterrorism.

Third, the structure and competitiveness of the news industry appear to influence media attention to terrorism. As the media environment becomes more decentralized and competitive, news outlets may try to maintain market share by devoting more attention to terrorist attacks that employ novel tactics or that are particularly violent. Such a development could pose new challenges for the media relations of homeland security agencies by giving the public a distorted picture of the threat from terrorism and reducing the ability of the authorities to explain their policies and to put the problem of terrorism in an appropriate context.

Fourth, existing research is beginning to explore how the tone with which the media covers terrorism influences the attitudes and behaviours of mass publics, including voters, as well as potential sympathizers with terrorist movements. There is considerable evidence that coverage of terrorism increases fear and anxiety and that these emotional changes influence the preference of some members of the public for counterterrorism policies that rely on force. This may make it more difficult for authorities to respond to terrorist attacks with other types of policies, even

²⁸ Turpin-Petrosino, C. (2015). *Understanding Hate Crime: Acts, Motives, Offenders, Victims, and Justice*. New York: Routledge.

²⁹ Gill, P. (2015). *Lone- Actor Terrorism: A Behavioral Analysis*. New York: Routledge.

³⁰ Spaaij, R. (2012). *Understanding Lone Wolf Terrorism: Global Patterns, Motivations and Prevention*. New York: Springer.

³¹ Gus, M. (2011). *Essentials of terrorism: concepts and controversies*, Sage Publications, Inc, USA.

³² Kern, M, Just, M., & Norris, P. (2003). The lessons of framing terrorism. In Norris, P, Kern, M & Just M (Eds.), *Framing terrorism*, London, Routledge.

if these policies might produce superior results. It is sometimes claimed that terrorists are effective in manipulating media coverage to convey their message to a mass audience and to gain sympathizers and supporters.³³ In other words, the narrative in the news stories about terrorist acts concentrates on the human-interest angle, without emphasising or discussing on the historical background of the perpetrators of the violence acts or the victims of the violence acts. Although the media look for drama in all the events they consider worthy of being reported, the emphasis on the tragedy, violence, reactive and theatrical aspects of terrorist acts at the expense of detailed analysis of the events is so one-sided that one American political philosopher refers to broadcast coverage of terrorism, in particular, as a “phonograph of grief”.³⁴

3. LONE WOLF ATTACKS AND PROPAGANDA

More substantively, there may be two types of lone-wolf terrorist: the *disconnected–disordered* and the *caring-compelled*.

Disconnected–disordered lone-wolf terrorists are like school attackers and assassins, who are predominantly lone actors, in showing five common characteristics:

- 1) grievance,
- 2) planful rather than impulsive attack,
- 3) weak social ties (“loners”),
- 4) mental health problems (especially depression), and
- 5) experience with weapons outside the military.

A prominent example of this type is the Unabomber, Theodore Kaczynski. These common characteristics suggest that *disconnected–disordered* lone-wolf terrorists may be part of a larger phenomenon of lone-actor perpetrators of planful violence who have little to lose in escaping the pain of depression and loneliness. It may be only the accident of how an individual describes his grievance that determines whether the attacker is called terrorist or assassin or school attacker.

Whether research finds a way to distinguish the psychology of lone-wolf terrorists from that of school attackers and assassins, the *disconnected–disordered* type is consistent with the two-pyramids model. This type moves to violence not only from radical ideas of grievance but from elements of unfreezing, escape, and status seeking.³⁵

Caring-compelled lone-wolf terrorists are normal, socially connected, and even idealistic individuals who feel an unusual degree of sympathy for victims of injustice; their feelings push them toward a personal moral obligation to bring justice to the perpetrators. An example of this type is anti-abortion terrorist Clayton Waagner, who shut down abortion facilities across the United States—twice—with anthrax threats.³⁶ Rare or not, *caring-compelled* lone-wolf terrorists do represent a challenge to the two-pyramids model, and sympathy-induced outrage may be only one of the emotions that can push radical opinions to radical action.

The lone wolf terrorist is typically someone who acts out of a strong ideological or religious conviction, carefully plans their actions, and may successfully hide their intentions from others.

The new wave of violent propaganda has prompted much debate about the role of the Islamic State’s videos in attracting militants as well as the degree to which the media itself is responsible for providing terrorism with the “oxygen of publicity”.³⁷

The transnational nature of this new form of terrorism is largely dependent on mass and social media. The readiness of the news media organisation to cover such events facilitates the spread of terror.

Furthermore, terrorists use the material from these organisations to recreate videos, train and recruit terrorists for further attacks.

³³Walsh, JI. (2010). *Media Attention to Terrorist Attacks: Causes and Consequences*, Institute for Homeland Security Solutions.

³⁴Weimann, G & Winn, C. (1994). *The Theatre of Terror: Mass Media and International Terrorism*, London, Longman.

³⁵McCauley, C., Moskaleiko, S. (2014). Toward a profile of lone wolf terrorists: What moves an individual from radical opinion to radical action? *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 26, 69–85.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2014.849916>

³⁶McCauley, C., Moskaleiko, S. (2011). *Friction: How radicalization happens to them and us*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

³⁷Burke, J. (2016). “How the changing media is changing terrorism”, *The Guardian*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/25/how-changing-media-changing-terrorism>

Police Commissioner Bill Bratton told reporters that compared to attacks by al-Qaeda, “ISIS would be much more into the inspiration of the lonewolf. . . . They’re very sophisticated in their capabilities through their videos, through their social media, through their magazines.”³⁸

The first ISIS-inspired lone wolf attack in America came on September 26, 2014, when thirty-year-old Alton Nolen beheaded a co-worker at a food processing plant in Oklahoma. A prison convert to Islam whose digital footprint involved ISIS propaganda.

ISIS’s explicit call for Western supporters to carry out “lone wolf” attacks in their home countries became a core part of the group’s propaganda over the next two years.

The current cases of the Jihadist lone operators Rachmat Akilow (Stockholm), Khalid Masood (London), Anis Amri (Berlin) and Safia S. (Hannover) and the attacker on a regional train close to Würzburg explain the obvious grey areas between autonomous Jihadist lone operators and their ties to the Islamist-Jihadist milieu and/or international Jihadist organisations like IS and Al Qaida.³⁹ During the Jihadist attack of a 31-year-old Tunisian Mohamed Bouhlel on 14 July 2016 in Nice on the Promenade des Anglais, the latter used a truck and firearms to kill 86 people and to injure more than 400. On the evening of 14 July, there were approximately 30,000 people present on the promenade in Nice, waiting to watch the fireworks display celebrating the national holiday. The Tunisian lone operator Mohamed Salmene Lahouaiej Bouhlel, who migrated to France in 2005, lived in Nice and had a residence permit valid until 2019. According to French security authorities, he became known as a criminal shortly before his attack and had been sentenced to a 6-month suspended sentence. According to the French attorney general, Bouhlel had declared support for the “Islamic State” and researched propaganda material.⁴⁰

Investigators say the terrorist attack on two mosques in New Zealand was carried out by a single perpetrator. But referring to him as a “lone wolf” deceptively conceals a breeding ground of extreme-right terror.

Norwegian terrorist Anders Behring Breivik, who murdered 77 people on July 22, 2011, is often cited as a prototypical “lone wolf” perpetrator of terrorist attacks.⁴¹ “Europe is becoming increasingly familiar with attacks by extremists, but Breivik’s actions made him the deadliest lone wolf attacker in the continent’s history.”⁴²

“The idea that terrorists operate alone allows us to break the link between an act of violence and its ideological hinterland.”⁴³ Burke believes that the lone wolf theory “implies that the responsibility for an individual’s violent extremism lies solely with the individual themselves.”

Modern terrorists may not always belong to a group that can be clearly named such as al-Qaida, the “Islamic State” or the National Socialist Underground (NSU), an extreme-right German terrorist cell that was responsible for a string of murders. Nevertheless, their radicalization takes place in the social climate in which they live. The internet and social media allow terrorists unprecedented ways to network globally and the ability to propagate their ideologies — right up to livestreaming their attacks on Facebook, as was the case with the Christchurch attack.

Most experts agree that terrorists are products of their time. An increase in intolerance has established itself in recent years as a global social trend, fueled by political discourse that is becoming increasingly populist. The yearning for simple answers polarizes; strangers and those with different viewpoints quickly become enemies. Extremism is taking root in mainstream society — a trend that is reinforced with the digitalization of human life.

Real relationships are replaced by virtual ones. But even online interactions have real consequences. David Sonboly, who murdered nine people at a Munich shopping mall on July 22, 2016, was heavily involved in online xenophobic networks. Sonboly deliberately chose the fifth anniversary of Breivik’s terrorist attack as the date for his shooting. He received praise from certain circles of like-minded people for the choice of date.

³⁸ NYPD. (2014). Threat to U.S. ‘Growing Exponentially with ISIS.’ *CBS News*, September 11. Available at: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/terror-threat-to-us-growing-exponentially-with-isis-nypd-says/>. [Accessed 5 May 2019].

³⁹ Stefan Goertz, Alexander E. Streitparth. (2019). *The New Terrorism-Actors, Strategies and Tactics*, Springer Nature Switzerland.

⁴⁰ Klimm, L. (2016). Frankreich: Der Attentäter von Nizza – radikal, kaltblütig und labil. *Süddeutsche Zeitung* 18.07.2016. Retrieved January 15, 2019, from <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/frankreich-der-attentaeter-von-nizza-radikal-kaltbluetig-und-labil-1.3084147>

⁴¹ Berntzen, L.E., Sandberg, S. (2014). The Collective Nature of Lone Wolf Terrorism: Anders Behring Breivik and the Anti-Islamic Social Movement. *Terrorism and Political Violence*. Vol 26 (5).

⁴² Seierstad, A. (2016). Is Norwegian mass murderer Anders Breivik still a threat to Europe? *Newsweek*. Available at: <https://www.newsweek.com/anders-breivik-neo-nazi-suing-norway-asne-seierstad-447247>. [Accessed 2 March 2019].

⁴³ Burke, J. (2017). The myth of the ‘lone wolf’ terrorist. *The Guardian*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2017/mar/30/myth-lone-wolf-terrorist>. [Accessed 2 March 2019].

Some jihadi attackers who struck in Europe were presumed to be lone wolf perpetrators who idealized IS, but actually had virtual contact with IS members in Syria and Iraq immediately before carrying out their attacks.

Should Christchurch attacker Tarrant actually prove to be the author of the 74-page manifesto, then he is explicitly making parallels between himself, Breivik and Dylann Roof, the white supremacist who shot nine black churchgoers in Charleston, South Carolina on June 17, 2015.

It is known that both Breivik and Tarrant were in contact with other far-right extremists at home and abroad, both in real life and online. Tarrant in particular has traveled extensively, including in Europe. On his Facebook profile, which has since been deleted, he shared extremist content and articles about right-wing extremists from Europe, including at least one report on right-wing extremist soldiers in the Bundeswehr — Germany's armed forces — who for him are apparently kindred spirits.

Breivik and Tarrant view themselves as modern-day crusaders in the battle to preserve the purity of an allegedly threatened white European breed. Both regard Muslims in particular to be "invaders" who strive for world domination.

Membership in groups and "acting alone," however, are concepts increasingly difficult to apply in a world where terrorist organizations increasingly organize virtually through social media.

We found that social ties play a crucial role throughout the process leading from ideological radicalization to the planning and preparation of terrorist attacks.

France and the United Kingdom (UK) have suffered tremendously the brunt of lone-wolf terrorist attacks over the last years. Naturally, these incidences have attracted huge media attention. Various media pundits have sounded an alarm that major news outlets focused on terrorist attacks in Western Europe, such as the 13 November attacks in Paris and the 22 March attacks in Brussels, with 24/7, wall-to-wall coverage while giving scant attention to equally deadly and destructive terrorism attacks in Turkey, Lebanon and Africa.⁴⁴

The manner in which these events are covered by the news media and the discriminate attention they receive polarises global public consensus on the fight against the terrorism. Importantly, it has also raised a very poignant question regarding the extent to which lone-wolf terrorists are exploiting the media, particularly television, to achieve their objectives.

Car and truck bombs targeting major financial or political centers (such as the Irish Republican Army bombing in London in the 1990s, and attacks in New York and Oklahoma City during that same decade) have been superseded by person-borne devices, especially suicide attacks; mass shootings; the deliberate targeting of crowds with vehicles; and knife attacks. From an urban planning perspective, this means that terror groups are increasingly aiming at soft targets and crowded places that cannot be altered without radically changing how we experience our cities.

While obvious, there is no one-size-fits all response to urban terrorism. Preventing attacks by so-called "lone wolves" or " sleeper cells" in the U.S. requires a very different set of tactics than those used to counter sophisticated networks of highly-trained operatives in an active war zone like Yemen. In cities like Mosul, Mogadishu or Mumbai, terrorists are fielding highly elaborate operations and weaponry. Their goal is to deny the government's ability to secure the city for as long as possible.

A new generation of social media monitoring systems is also held up as another front against urban terrorism. The idea is to track millions of Facebook, Twitter, Youtube and Instagram feeds to detect would-be perpetrators who might telegraph their intentions.

The rise of lone-wolf terrorism, as this phenomenon is often called, presents a new challenge in the fight against modern day urban terrorism.

4. CONCLUSION

This paper investigated the role of media in terrorist environments. Particular consideration was given to lone wolf terrorists' efforts to publicize their cause, their manipulation of mass communication, and the prospective impact of the new Media. Issues related to reporting terrorism including question about which incidents to report and how to report them. The concepts of information as power and media-oriented terrorism were defined and explored as decisive reflections in understanding the role of media.

In all places in the world, the architects of terrorism take advantage of the mass-media—including the Internet for the benefit of their operational effectiveness, information gathering, recruitment, fund raising, and propaganda methods.

⁴⁴Hartman. N. (2016). "Media Bias and Terrorism Coverage", *Huffington Post*. Available at: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/media-bias-and-terrorismcoverage_us_57850521e4b04041a985abfa

However, lone actors' frequent inability to recruit or join others for terrorist purposes does not mean that they drop all social interaction or that their social environment plays no part in their offending. Lone actors typically radicalize in both online and offline "radical milieus." Through such interaction, they develop weak or affiliative social ties with radical actors, even if their integration and socialization in these milieus is often partial, peripheral, and discontinuous.

In the future, technological developments would allow terrorist attacks to be pulled out in ways that were previously unthinkable. Terrorists found an influential partner in the mass media that would help them obtain public attention for the group and its demands.

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