

The Frankfurt Airport Attack: A Case Study on the Radicalization of a Lone-Actor Terrorist

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The case of the Frankfurt Airport attack in 2011 in which a 21-year-old man shot several U.S. soldiers, murdering 2 U.S. airmen and severely wounding 2 others, is assessed with the Terrorist Radicalization Assessment Protocol (TRAP-18). The study is based on an extensive qualitative analysis of investigation and court files focusing on the complex interconnection among offender personality, specific opportunity structures, and social contexts. The role of distal psychological factors and proximal warning behaviors in the run up to the deed are discussed. Although in this case the proximal behaviors of fixation on a cause and identification as a “soldier” for the cause developed over years, we observed only a very brief and accelerated pathway toward the violent act. This represents an important change in the demands placed upon threat assessors.

Keywords: lone actor terror, radicalization, risk assessment, terrorism, warning-behavior

Lone-actor terrorists or autonomous cells can have an enormous impact on the general feeling of security in societies. Although most of the perpetrators withdraw themselves from society in the run up to their deed, the radicalization processes do not occur in a social vacuum. The perpetrators categorize their environment in “good” and “bad”/“believer”/“infidel”, thereby defining foes and social entities in whose name they are claiming to

act. The Internet often plays an important role in the process of self-recruitment and mobilization. Recent examples of such incidents in Europe have been the attack on the French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* in January 2015 and the combining of a bombing in the Norwegian capital of Oslo with a mass murder on the island of Utøya in July 2011.

A deeper understanding of such forms of targeted violence is needed for improving prevention efforts. With that in mind, this study takes a close look at the Frankfurt Airport attack in 2011, in which a 21-year-old man shot several American soldiers, murdering two U.S. airmen and severely wounding two others. To identify distal psychological factors and proximal warning signs the case was assessed with the Terrorist Radicalization Assessment Protocol (TRAP-18).

The Lone-Actor Phenomenon in Context

Although lone-actor terrorists are not direct members of extremist groups, most identify themselves with larger movements and frame their acts of violence within ideological con-

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The study is part of the research network Incident and Case Analysis of Highly Expressive Targeted Violence (TARGET), which is granted by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) under the program Research for Civil Security II.

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texts. Gill, Horgan, and Deckert (2014) analyzed the characteristics of 119 lone-actor terrorists who committed their deeds in the United States or Europe. In 34% of these cases, the perpetrators were inspired by a right-wing ideology whereas 43% devoted their attack to a jihadist worldview. The remaining 23% dedicated their act to other causes such as the anti-abortion movement or environmental campaigns. Unaffiliated individuals seeking a cause are only one side of the coin. On the other side, we also have to understand the lone-actor phenomenon as a strategy of extremist groups (Bakker & de Graaf, 2011).

As we know from the history of extremism and terrorism, state repression often leads to radical innovation. This is not only true for radical Islamism but also for far right- and left-wing movements. The lone-actor, lone-terrorist, lone-operator, or lone-wolf phenomenon can be seen as a result of such a process of innovation. The Southern Poverty Law Center registered 62 terrorist attacks in the United States between 2009 and 2015. Almost three quarters of them (74%, or 46 cases) were committed by single actors. In contrast, only 26% (16 cases) were executed by groups (Lenz & Potok, 2015).

Lone-actor terrorism as a tactic and strategy in Western Countries can be traced back to the far-right movement in the United States, when Louis Beam, former leading member of the Ku Klux Klan and Aryan Nations, advocated the strategy of leaderless resistance to continue the war against the government despite a vast imbalance of power and resources (Gill, 2015). Rather than waiting for instructions, White nationalists were encouraged to infiltrate democratic systems. As wolves in sheep's clothing, he argued that they should attack whenever time seemed favorable for them (Bakker & de Graaf, 2011).

With their call for a worldwide Islamic resistance, Al-Qaida leader Osama Bin Laden and ideologists such as Abu Musab al-Suri and Abu al-Masri initiated the organization's post-9/11 strategy in a similar way. However, more than 10 years of war against Islamic terrorism has weakened its organizational structures. Thus, the possibility is remote that Islamist organizations would be able to execute a centrally organized offensive such as 9/11 again (Steinberg, 2013). Indeed, after 2001 Western countries became targets of attacks by lone operators and autonomous groups. Believers all over the world were cheered by radical

preachers and propagandists to demoralize Western infidels and their collaborators, launching small but constant and unpredictable attacks. Al Qaida is often the ideological inspiration in these cases, but activists usually keep organizational links to an absolute minimum (Bakker & de Graaf, 2011; Sageman, 2008). We currently observe that the Islamic State follows a similar agenda in Western countries (Hegghammer & Nesser, 2015).

The Internet as a Context of Radicalization

The Internet plays a central role in the triumphal possession of the "lone-wolf" tactic. It is an instrument for disseminating propaganda and a social context for radicalization. Individuals dealing with personal and/or collective grievances, seeking a cause or preparing for an attack, find broad support and instructions in numerous jihadist forums and online magazines such as Al Qaida's *Inspire* or the Islamic State's *Dabique*.

With their presence in highly frequented online networks such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, extremist groups have also found a bridge into the center of society (Brachman, 2014; Weimann, 2015). Young people use the Internet for their daily management of identity, information, and relationships (Cortesi & Gasser, 2015). Within online contexts ideological fragments and contents of extremist propaganda are available like goods in a shop window, ready for recombination to fit people's needs.

A recent study noticed a growing trend among lone-actor terrorists to use virtual learning and interactions to shape their preattack behavior (Gill, 2015). It was found that in many of the cases this virtual interaction helped the later attackers to reinforce their radical beliefs, legitimize their violent actions, disseminate propaganda, and signal their attack plans to others online beforehand. The latter communication is also referred to as leakage warning behavior (Meloy & O'Toole, 2011).

With the decoupling from organizational structures, terror attacks show a wide range of scenarios, diverse in target selection and use of weapons. As Bakker and de Graaf (2011, p. 4) concluded, lone-operator attacks "may be less lethal but harder to fight; there are fewer clues to collect and less chatter to hear." Thus, a behavioral-oriented approach seems more important than ever to identify individual warning

signs that come along with these silent processes of radicalization.

Detecting and Assessing Warning Signs of Lone-Actor Terrorism

With the goal to prevent targeted violence, the discipline of threat assessment has emerged within the last 3 decades (Meloy & Hoffmann, 2014). A focus is on behavioral markers that can be used as warning signals for a violent attack. One current model serving that purpose is the warning behavior typology of eight different behavioral patterns (Meloy & Hoffmann, 2014; Meloy, Hoffmann, Guldemann, & James, 2012). When combined with 10 psychological factors for lone-wolf offenders (Meloy & Yakeley, 2014), it is called the Terrorist Radicalization Assessment Protocol (TRAP-18; see Appendix). The 10 psychological factors are seen as distal characteristics that should lead to a monitoring of the case (Meloy, Roshdi, Glaz-Ocik, & Hoffmann, 2015). If at least one proximal warning behavior is present, then more active case management is suggested.

More efforts are also being made to spot radical activities on the Internet for the purpose of prevention (Sanfilippo, McGrath & Bell, 2014). The warning behaviors of identification, fixation, and leakage may serve as forensic linguistic markers to detect radical violence in social media (Brynielsson et al., 2013; Cohen, Johansson, Kaati, & Mork, 2014) through data mining.

Method

The progress of science is marked by the dynamic interplay between idiographic and nomothetic data. In other words, case studies individualize our understanding of group phenomena, and group studies—often focused upon comparisons, correlations, or even predictions—keep in check the risk of inductive reasoning from individual cases. Terrorism is no exception. Empirical studies of groups of individual terrorists are relatively recent (Gill, 2015; Spaaij, 2011) and very important, but case studies put flesh to the bone; they help us understand the unique characteristics and commonly shared attributes of those who are ideologically motivated to commit violence toward noncombatants. They often allow for a deep

dive into the distal and proximal variables that contributed to the targeted violence. Such is the case involving an attack at Frankfurt Airport in Germany in 2011.

The case study is based on an extensive qualitative analysis of investigation and court files. The analyzed data of approximately 8,200 pages included testimonies of the perpetrator, family members, friends, acquaintances, and teachers as well as investigation reports and psychological assessments. As we coded the material, we focused on

1. Sequences of biographical events in the perpetrator's life to identify personal crises, turning points, and triggers leading to changes in his thinking, emotions, and behavior.
2. Testimonies and writings of the perpetrator himself to gain insights into his perception, self-concept, and implicit theories as well as conscious and unconscious motives for behavior.
3. The perpetrator's habits and actions observed by the social environment to discern escalating and warning behaviors in the run up to the deed.
4. Constant or changing social networks and social reactions that were meaningful to the perpetrator to make out associates and enemies as well as to understand exacerbating and mitigating effects on the perpetrator's behavior, thinking, and emotions.

Why This Case Is Worth Analyzing

Of 11 jihadist terror plots in Germany, the case of Frankfurt Airport is unique. As of this writing it is the only successfully committed Islamic terror attack in the Federal Republic. This might be because it is also the only case that was planned and eventually committed by a self-radicalized single operator who hardly attracted attention before—neither to law enforcement or secret service, nor to family and friends who described the perpetrator as an introverted, not aggressive, trustworthy, and humorous guy.

“U,” who has Kosovan and Serbian citizenship, was born in 1990. At the time of the offense, he was 21 years old. He was the second of three children and lived in Germany since he

was 5 years old. He was convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment for the murder of U.S. soldiers in two cases as well as attempted murder in three cases. He had no previous convictions. According to the psychological assessment, he was criminally liable because he had no personality disorder or mental illness. However, the expert witness recognized a fragile self-worth, inhibited social assertiveness, fragmented identity, and pessimistic sentiment.

The Attack at Frankfurt Airport

On March 2, 2011 at 2:51 p.m., U observed two soldiers as they were storing their luggage in a military bus outside of Terminal 2 at Frankfurt Airport. He was eager not to attract attention and pretended to make a call with his mobile phone. As the two U.S. soldiers went back to the arrival area of the airport, U waited. After a few minutes, the uniformed servicemen returned with 13 comrades who immediately built up a row of luggage in front of the bus. U started small talk by asking the man next to him for a cigarette and about his destination. Because he heard that the soldiers were going to Afghanistan, he later said that that was the moment when he made the final decision to attack.

He took the backpack off of his shoulders in which he stored a firearm, a 9-mm Luger. Hidden by the outer layer of the bag, he inserted a magazine into the pistol and pulled the hood of his jacket over his head. He waited for the soldiers to enter the bus. As the last of them came out of the terminal and passed U, he shot the soldier in the back of his head from a very close distance. The man instantly died.

U immediately entered the bus at 3:17 p.m. and shot the driver in the face, killing him. He moved toward the soldiers in the back of the bus shouting *Allahu Akbar* ("God is great"). One of the soldiers later testified that U appeared to be very nervous, as if he did not know what should happen next. Although his comrades were already hiding behind their seats, one serviceman was still standing in the central aisle. U shot him in the head, which resulted in serious injury. Recognizing his impasse, one of the soldiers decided to leave his cover and faced the perpetrator with waving hands. Hit by a bullet, he also suffered severe injury. U kept on walking along the aisle and aimed his firearm at the face

of another man ducked down behind a seat. U pulled the trigger. The firearm jammed; the soldier jumped up and attacked the gunman. They started to scuffle.

After unsuccessfully trying to grab a knife he had brought with him, U escaped out of the bus. He climbed over a barrier in the direction of another terminal, pursued by some of the soldiers. As two patrolling police officers became aware of the manhunt, they started to pursue the perpetrator. Finally a passerby stepped in U's way and slowed him down. The officers drew their guns and ordered him to freeze. With the knife in his hand, U faced one of the officers, came closer, and threatened to stab him. The second officer reached the perpetrator's back. With a truncheon in her hand, she advised U to put down the knife. The perpetrator gave up and was arrested without any resistance. From that time forward he was cooperative and admitted the deed.

The Hours Before the Attack

U made several testimonies to the police and to federal attorneys about the circumstances leading up to the shooting. According to his statements he browsed through some Islam-related websites on the evening before his attack as he had done many times before. He came across two videos: one that showed the dead faces of "Islamic martyrs" and one that dealt with female Muslims harmed by U.S. soldiers. U said he was not aware that he was watching a radical Islamist propaganda video showing a staged rape scene taken from a Hollywood movie. He was disturbed and not able to return to his daily routine. He could not sleep all night, and even the next morning he still could not get the rape scene out of his head. After staying up, showering, watching TV, browsing the Internet, and eating breakfast with these pictures still in mind, he knew that he had "to do something."

As he was working at the post office at Frankfurt Airport, he remembered that he had seen U.S. soldiers there several times before. He also believed that he had heard them chattering about raping Muslim girls. For him, it was a fateful question: If he saw soldiers at the airport that day, he would have to kill them because in this case, Allah would want him to protect his sisters in faith. However, if he did not see any servicemen, and did not act, it would be acceptable for him, too—at least he would have

proven his willingness to fulfill his duty. He wrote a short message to his brother asking him if his pistol was still working. He made up the cover story for him that he had a potential purchaser for it. After the brother had confirmed the proper functioning, U spent the next hours consuming jihadist content online.

Shortly before leaving the house for work, he prepared his attack by grabbing the gun with 39 cartridges, a pocketknife, and a combat knife, and he stored the equipment in a backpack and a belt pouch. At 1:34 p.m. he took the bus to Frankfurt Airport. On his way, he was hearing, among others, the following *nashid* (Arabic chant) on his iPod:

Mother, remain steadfast, I have joined the Jihad. Do not mourn for me and know I have been awakened. The umma has been blinded, but I have been honored. Mother, remain steadfast, your son has joined the Jihad. The umma has been blinded but I have been honored. Mother, remain steadfast, your son has joined the Jihad. The screams became louder, the injuries increased. The unfulfilled duty, I could not find peace. Today I must leave, tomorrow it is too late. Mother, remain steadfast, your son has joined the Jihad. Today I must leave, tomorrow it is too late. Mother, remain steadfast, your son has joined the Jihad. . . .

Later he claimed that his attack was neither a planned nor a terroristic attack. He testified that he was rather driven by emotions and the intention to rescue Muslim women from the harm of American soldiers. However, the results of the investigation painted another picture—a picture of a successive process of radicalization through Islamist (Salafist) ideology. In the beginning of 2010, more than 1 year before his attack, he revealed his radical rejection of infidels in chats with “brothers in faith.” He wrote that dying the martyr’s death was worth striving for and legitimized by the Quran if the actor shouts out *Allahu Akbar*. He expressed his sympathy with jihadists and regarded the United States as the personified devil. He also thought about traveling to Iraq or Afghanistan to become a jihadist.

Biography and Radicalization Process

In 1995 Germany became the residence for U’s family. They had emigrated from Kosovo when U was about 5 years old. Until 2007 his father worked full time as a self-employed roofer and his mother was a housewife. In his testimonies he described the family life as harmonious at first.

His parents had a happy marriage. They also had a good relationship with their Kosovan relatives and traveled to the Balkans every 2 years. Having a Muslim background, the family visited the mosque sporadically for Friday prayer and complied conscientiously with the fasting rules during Ramadan. However, beyond that, the Quran was not a noteworthy topic at home. Because his parents were not able to fluently speak German, the family usually communicated in the Albanian language at home. The siblings themselves preferred to speak German with each other.

U had difficulties finding friends at first. He traced this partly back to the anonymity of the neighborhood he lived in and partly to his personal characteristics. He explained that he generally had problems establishing friendships and speaking to strangers and that he tended to withdraw from other people in difficult social situations. He never had a girlfriend or a sexual relationship. According to his statements, he was very shy and therefore he never tried to speak with girls, let alone date them. When family members or friends asked or made fun of this issue, he usually invoked religious reasons as a rationalization. Nevertheless, U did have some friendships and acquaintances. In 1997 he got to know “S,” who later became his best friend. Because S also had a Muslim background, both visited different mosques for Friday prayer. Beyond that religious practices were not the subject of conversations or shared activities. Moreover, approximately four other people belonged to his inner circle of friends. They played video games together, listened to music, and regularly visited the cinema.

In 2006 and 2007, when U was about 16 years old, he experienced a major change and stressor in his family life: his father suffered a heart attack. He became partly incapacitated for work and eventually had to give up his roofing company. Because his wife also had no income, the financial situation of the family deteriorated and they became dependent on social benefits. U noticed that his parents became increasingly unsatisfied during the ensuing months.

U’s school achievements had always been rather poor. He said that he was lazy most of his school career. He never did his homework and was frequently distracted during the lessons. As a result, his promotion was endangered several times and finally, after 10th grade, he did not achieve school-leaving qualification. During in-

terrogation he remembered that his parents reacted in a disappointed and sulky way. According to his testimonies it was about the same time when he seriously turned to Islam. He especially acquired a liking for the compliance with the prohibitions of Islam. He did not celebrate, he did not drink, and he tried not to curse when he was playing on the computer. The implementation of religious rules into his lifestyle gave him a sense of satisfaction. He enjoyed his newly developed discipline and his daily routine that was structured by prayers. He felt good about fulfilling his duty. To clarify questions of faith, he researched on the Internet for religious advice. He generally focused on Salafist content because the related sermons and explanations seemed quite understandable and unambiguous to him. By and by he got increasingly confident in practicing his religion. In 2007, he also became a forum member of the German version of the Global Islamic Mediafront, a group of online activists who associated themselves with Al Qaida. The former head of the group was arrested and convicted because of the support of a terrorist organization at the end of 2007.

After U became aware that he had to repeat a school year again, he was not motivated to attend school any longer—he saw no future for himself. However, suffering from his parents' disappointment about him, he finally forced himself to attend 10th grade again. Eventually he received a good middle school degree and even decided to follow up by changing to the university track in secondary school.

Because most of the pupils already knew each other, he did not have a lot of friends at his new school. Nevertheless he established close contact with four Muslim peers. With them he had discussions about religious questions and ideological points of view, and he visited mosques between 2008 and 2010 on a regular basis. Some of these places of worship, where U and his friends also attended Islam seminars 10–15 times, were commonly known as meeting points for preachers and members of the radical Islamic scene.

His academic performance worsened again in high school. He started to skip lessons and stayed at home playing on his computer. He loved video games because, according to his own words, while playing them he was in full control of his environment. Shortly before the end of 11th grade, he knew that he had to repeat the year again but was reluctant to tell his par-

ents about it. He simply did not want to see them disappointed again. During this time he also felt useless, tired, and exhausted, and he brooded about the senselessness of life. He also suffered from extreme feelings of guilt toward his parents because of his poor school performance and his inability to support them financially like his brother. He actually knew that he would not be able to help them as long as he was a school student. He began to ruminate about suicide and even thought about methods to do it. Although, in his view, Islam prevented him from killing himself, he did not find the strength to practice his religion at that time.

Soon his lethargy attracted the attention of his class teacher, who convinced him not to quit school but to repeat the grade. Although showing better performance in the first half of the year, U soon skipped classes again. He never talked with his family or friends about his problems—his trouble in school or his emotional state. However, he did turn to his school director on his own initiative. The director supposed that U might have substantial depression and advised him to contact his liaison teacher and a psychologist. After a first contact with a therapist via telephone, he decided against psychological counseling.

U finally quit school in the middle of 12th grade, without telling his parents or his brother, 1 year before the exams for access to university. He had realized that he would not be able to catch up the knowledge gaps that he had caused by his absence. U led his family to believe that he had finished the university track and was waiting for a place to study in the natural sciences. For him, leaving school was the only way possible for a fresh start. From this point on he felt better, his symptoms of depression vanished, and he was even able to practice his faith again. From 2010 onward he prayed five times a day. In this context he oriented toward the literal interpretation of Islam and desired a social order shaped by Sharia law. After he had joined several Islam-related groups on Facebook, he was mostly confronted with Salafist and jihadist material on social media platforms.

During the trial a journalist testified that several of his informants recognized U between June and July 2010 as a member of a Salafist summer camp in Bosnia; it was suspected of offering military and ideological training to its participants. This might be an explanation for

U's shooting skills displayed during his murders at the airport. However, his participation at the camp could not be proven.

After he returned from his summer holiday in Kosovo, his friends noticed his untrimmed beard. Shortly after, U successively distanced himself from them. During this time, he deleted contacts from his Facebook list of friends who had no Muslim background. Instead, he added people to his profile as long as they had a nickname or profile picture that was associated with Islam. On Facebook he also "friended" some famous propagandists and preachers of the Salafist scene, but beyond that no further contact with them could be found.

In August 2010, after trying to get an apprentice position, he started a voluntary social year at an Islamic nursing service for 180€/40 hr per week. In addition, he drew on social welfare. His depressive mood vanished completely during this time. He enjoyed helping other people and felt needed, useful, and alive.

By the end of 2010, a radical Islamic ideology was also apparent in his statements expressed online and in real life. He stated his aversion toward the United States and Americans, as well as some of his colleagues and friends, and he declared his sympathies with jihadist fighters. In October 2010 he had intensive discussions about the role of the U.S. military in Afghanistan with one of his best friends who also had U.S. citizenship. In this context, U forwarded videos from WikiLeaks that showed U.S. soldiers firing at civilians and Americans converting to Islam. During these conversations he also expressed his regret for failed terrorist attacks committed by "his people" in the United Kingdom and the United States. When his friend asked him via ICQ (an instant messaging computer program) if he considered dying for Islam, he responded, "If I answered this question, the federal police would knock at my door today." In general, U regarded Western soldiers in Afghanistan and Iraq as occupying troops, and he held the view that defensive Jihad in Islamic as well as in European or American countries was therefore legitimized. Furthermore, he advocated the killing of U.S. soldiers as retaliation for the burning of Qurans. During this time, U also considered traveling to Iraq or Afghanistan to affiliate with the jihadist fighters. Within multiplayer first-person shooting games, he attracted attention by expressing fantasies about killing infidels with knives or burning them. All in all, he portrayed the

Western troops as aggressors in Afghanistan and Iraq. According to his testimonies he believed in the propaganda videos that portrayed the U.S. Americans as the personification of the devil. He was sure that they deserved to die for their transgressions.

After a request of reimbursement of 200€ by the welfare agency, he became dependent on a second job. In November 2010, he started to work for a temporary employment agency at the post center at Frankfurt Airport and got a fixed-term contract later on. In accordance with his own wishes the employment relationship at the Islamic Nursing Service later changed from social service to minor employment for 255€/month. However, a few weeks later, U was dismissed from employment because of organizational reasons and a lack of patients. U was irritated; he wondered why they first gave him a better contract just to fire him shortly after. Because he did not want to alienate them, he stayed calm. At the same time U feared that his contract with the post center would not be extended upon its expiration in April 2011. He was caught praying during working time, which had evoked displeasure in his supervisor.

He further reduced contact with friends, who thought that the reason for U's social withdrawal was his increased workload. He himself stated that the relationship toward his friends had always been superficial. It bothered him that he could only talk about games and TV with them. He never participated in their conversations about alcohol and women.

From January 2011 onward, U forbade himself to listen to music, although he always loved to do so. He countered the silence by listening to *anashid*, Islamic a capella battlesongs. While listening to them he always thought he was on the right path; they motivated and pushed him.

In February 2011, U started to upload thousands of Salafist and jihadist text documents, videos, and audios on his computer and iPod. Among them were essays about rules of conduct for different areas of life, standard references of the Salafist school of thought, and biographies of Salafist savants. Most of the content included the demand to turn away from the infidels and toward the brothers in faith and the glorification of martyrdom and armed Jihad in Islamic and in Western countries in defense of the Muslim community. Investigators also detected ideological advisories by Al Awlaki, which were also

found in the context of other cases of lone-actor terrorism such as the Fort Hood shooting in 2009, the intended but thwarted attack on Times Square in 2010, and in the case of the so-called Underwear Bomber, Abdulmutalib. Approximately 14 days in the run up to his attack, U changed his name to Abu Reyaan on Facebook.

Discussion

When his case is viewed through the lens of the TRAP-18, U is positive for six proximal warning behaviors and nine distal characteristics (see Appendix). The early stages of U's radicalization process can be traced back to 2006 and 2007 when he was about 16 or 17 years old. During this phase, we find several triggers for his cognitive opening toward jihadist ideology. There is a great amount of evidence that the deterioration of his family situation, his failures in school, and the perceived disappointment of his parents about his person led to massive psychosocial tensions and negative self-evaluations. Although his turn toward religion during this time might have been an expression of his need for meaning, stabilization, and self-worth, unambiguous and radical interpretations of Islam became highly attractive because they were easy to understand and helped him to reduce (social) complexity. He mainly focused on information he found on the Internet.

From 2008 until his deed in 2011, one can keep track of U's successive socialization toward extremism. Although he interpreted his life more and more in the light of Salafist and eventually jihadist ideology, he also started to adjust his actions according to it. By doing so his social identity as a true believer became more salient for him, overshadowing his personal identity that was burdened and shaped by narcissistic wounding. His fixation on personal grievances led to a vicarious identification with the suffering of Muslims by the hands of infidels, leading to a state of moral outrage. This dynamic likely paved the way for a growing identification with jihadist fighters. In his eyes they were glorious and powerful soldiers acting in the name of a higher cause.

However, U still had to handle ongoing and cumulating social stress. His negative perspective for the future and continuously decreasing alternatives for self-realization ultimately resulted in the perception that his personal biography would lead to a dead end. Having this in

mind, the identification with the Mujahidin identity became more and more important for the stabilization of his self-worth.

Because jihadist propaganda demands action at some point ("the forgotten duty"), he probably knew that sooner or later he had to settle this outstanding bill to keep the functionality of his new identity. In light of this interpretation, the video, in which U.S. soldiers were humiliating Muslim women, and the images of martyrs he viewed before served as a trigger for the violent act. The pictures he was confronted with reminded him of his duty to Jihad. When this divine indication reached him, he was already highly radicalized. By that time the opportunity costs for a terrorist attack seemed apparently low to him, and the means to execute the deed were lying directly in front of his eyes—an available handgun. The chance was too perfect for him to let it pass by.

As Lankford (2012) worked it out in his psychological autopsy of 9/11 ringleader Mohammed Atta, "the interaction between suicidal risk and ideology may provide the most complete explanation of his final behavior" (p. 159). U claimed that his religion was the only reason that prevented him from committing suicide in the summer of 2007. Keeping his life situation in 2011 in mind as well as his untreated depressive mood and his assumption that he would be killed by police or soldiers in the course of his deed, it thus stands to reason that U disguised his own wish of committing suicide by carrying out a martyrdom operation. He now had an ideological claim that helped him to interpret his actions and feelings as a justified act on a larger moral scale.

Conclusion

The case of U is similar to other cases of lone-actor terrorism in North America and Europe (Gill, 2015; Meloy et al., 2015). However, what is most interesting is his very brief and accelerated pathway, foreshadowing the behavior of lone-actor terrorists after the advent of ISIS in the summer of 2014 and their intense social media campaign that focuses upon three premises: (a) the West hates Islam, (b) the West is at war with Islam, and (c) it is every Muslim's obligation to kill the unbelievers wherever they are. Although his process of radicalization appears to have begun in the 10th grade when he was approximately 16 or 17 years old, the actual pathway to violence, primed by his immersion in Salafist ideology, did

not unfold over the course of weeks or months but in a day or two. This represents an important change in the demands placed upon threat assessors: there is much less time to find and then interdict along the late stages of the pathway (planning, preparation, implementation) in contrast to the relatively slower proximal behaviors of fixation on a cause and identification as a “soldier” for the cause, which still appear to take months, if not years, to fully develop.

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(Appendix follows)

Appendix

TRAP-18 Assessment for U

TRAP-18 assessment	Evidence in case study
Proximal warning behaviors	
Pathway	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Consumption of jihadist material online ● Visiting mosques to hear radical preachers ● Research on ideology and former terror attacks ● Organizing a handgun and taking it to the crime scene ● Hearing <i>anashid</i> about Jihad on the way to the crime scene ● Observation of victims
Fixation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fixation on personal grievances ● Fixation on the suffering of Muslims and the evilness of the United States ● Fixation on “the forgotten duty” of Jihad
Identification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Identification with jihadist ideology (duty to Jihad) ● Identification with mujahedeen ● Identification with <i>ummah</i>
Novel aggression	None
Energy burst	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Intensification of religious practices and consumption of ideological material ● Upload of tons of jihadist material on computer and music-player ● Adding randomly friends with Islamic names or profile pictures on social media sites
Leakage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Chat messages which legitimize jihadist violence and glorify martyrdom ● Expressed disgust toward infidels ● Writings in chats and forums about stabbing <i>kuffars</i> with a knife or burning them
Direct threat	None
Last resort	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Action imperative; felt he had to do something after he had seen fake rape videos
Distal characteristics	
Personal grievance and moral outrage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Father’s disease, failure in school, disappointment of parents, loss of job, bad financial situation ● Lethargy and lack of perspective ● Moral outrage about the occupation of Islamic countries by the West ● Moral outrage about the suffering of Muslims by the hand of infidels
Framed by an ideology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Turn toward unambiguous radical contents of jihadist ideology
Failure to affiliate with an extremist group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Social fears inhibit establishment of contacts ● No direct connection to radical scene at first ● As he gained more confidence about his knowledge on ideology he also reached out for social bondings in real-life radical contexts
Dependence on the virtual community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Research on religion and ideology via Internet ● Consumption of <i>fatwas</i>, <i>anashid</i>, and sermons via social media sites ● Exchange about ideology mainly via chat programs and forums
Thwarting of occupational goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Failure in school ● Inability to find a proper position as an apprentice ● Expirations of employment contracts ● No future perspectives

(Appendix continues)

Appendix (continued)

TRAP-18 assessment	Evidence in case study
Changes in thinking and emotion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Successive socialization toward extremism ● Adaption of black-and-white thinking with a simultaneous decrease in tensions and ambiguity ● Interpretation of life in light of ideology and adjustment of actions according to it ● Increase in intolerance against non-Muslims ● Increasing commitment to the cause
Failure of sexual-intimate pair bonding and the sexualization of violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Perpetrator never had a girlfriend or a sexual relationship ● He usually invoked religious reasons as a rationalization
Nexus of psychopathology and ideology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Criminal liability ● Fragile self-worth ● Inhibited social assertiveness ● Fragmented identity ● Pessimistic sentiment ● Clinical depression
Greater creativity and innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Deviation from the widespread modus operandi of Al Qaida bombings ● Military targets in a civilian setting ● No prior successful jihadist attack in Germany ● Execution of the attack with a pistol and a knife
Predatory violence (prior criminal violence by history)	None

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Received November 18, 2015

Revision received December 21, 2015

Accepted December 21, 2015 ■

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