

Special Section Introduction: Terrorism in Europe

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A Paris evening. The Bataclan Theater. November 13, 2015. Hundreds of young people dancing to the music of Eagles of Death Metal: “don’t say a prayer for me now, save it ‘til the morning after.” Celebrating freedom, life, a time of joy. They are about to be slaughtered by three individuals of their same age who hate freedom, life, joy, and modernity—although they depend upon modernity to carry out their mass murder: sophisticated weaponry, cellular networks, texting. Eighty-nine young people died in that theater, and 42 others in Paris that night.

Across the Atlantic 3 weeks later, December 2, 2015. A young married couple drops off their infant son with his grandmother who lives above them, and proceed to kill 14 of the husband’s coworkers during an office party at the Inland Regional Center, San Bernardino, California, a treatment center for the developmentally disabled. AR-15s did the work, military-style assault rifles, easy to get.

Both were autonomous cells, ideologically motivated, who pledged *bayat* to ISIS. But terrorism is not limited to the jihadists. It is apparent in the extremities of most belief systems, whether religious or secular, and throughout history, often coming in waves. It is absolutist, simplistic, Manichean, and often apocalyptic. But it always has a common vector of action: the intentional and targeted killing of noncombatants with an audience in mind. As Mikhail Bakunin, the Russian revolutionary anarchist, said near the end of the 19th century, it is “propaganda of the deed.”

In this special section, we focus on individual terrorism in Europe. The first study introduces the TRAP-18 (Terrorist Radicalization Assessment Protocol), a method to help determine which cases of concern need to be monitored, and which need to be actively risk managed. As the authors of this article, we hope that it will stimulate other research on the TRAP-18, which may eventually become a reliable and valid structured professional judgment instrument to help threat assessors manage such difficult cases.

Group studies, although the centerpiece of behavioral science investigation, often do not breathe life into the individuals being studied; hence we offer three cases which follow: first, an in-depth analysis of the only successful and lethal jihadist attack in Germany in which two soldiers were shot and killed at the Frankfurt airport; second, an analysis of the warning behaviors of Anders Breivik, the Norwegian mass murderer who killed 77 individuals, most of them adolescents, in July 2011; and third, a historical study of the assassination of Empress Elisabeth of Austria in 1898, in which we see a mixture of depression, anger, and grandiosity framed by ideology—in this case, anarchism—leading to a lone actor attack. The remarkable stability of terrorist dynamics over the past century are evident in this assassination of a beloved European figure.

The section finishes with commentary by two of the world’s leading thinkers and researchers concerning terrorism, Paul Gill at University College London, and Randy Borum at the University of South Florida. They offer a trenchant perspective on the threat from international terrorism, the state of the science and its limitations, and the directions forward. We thank all the authors who have contributed to this special section, and hope that threat assessors in both the public and private sectors will find this work both stimulating and useful in their risk management of persons who may be mobilizing for violence.

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