

# “Jihad Against the Enemies of Allah”: The Berlin Christmas Market Attack from a Threat Assessment Perspective

Nils Böckler, Dipl Päd,<sup>1</sup> Jens Hoffmann, PhD,<sup>1</sup> and J. Reid Meloy, PhD<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

The case of 24-year-old Anis A. who killed 12 and injured more than 50 people during a terror attack is analyzed from a threat assessment perspective. On December, 19th, 2016, the perpetrator drove a truck into a Christmas market in Berlin. The study is based on a qualitative analysis of investigation reports and open source media data. It traces the perpetrator’s psychological and social history of radicalization, as well as the role of five proximal warning behaviors that occurred before and correlated with the attack: leakage, fixation, identification, last resort, and pathway. Data show that security authorities had an enormous amount of information on the perpetrator before the attack. Eventually security agencies presumed that no acute threat from Anis A. existed a month before the attack. It will become increasingly important in the future that officials fall back on evidence-based and validated evaluation criteria. It is for this reason that both the development and implementation of structured risk and threat assessment instruments, as well as the scientific debate about them, are highly desirable.

**Keywords:** terror, radicalization, threat assessment, warning behavior, ISIS, targeted violence

## Introduction

ON DECEMBER, 19th, 2016, a 24-year-old Tunisian citizen drove a truck into a Christmas market near Berlin Memorial Church. During the attack 12 people died and more than 50 were severely injured. The perpetrator, Anis A., had stolen the truck near a mosque in which he had prayed for the last time shortly before he became a mass murderer.

This deed evokes associations with the terror attack in July 2016 in Nice, when a self-appointed jihadist also drove a truck into a crowd and killed 86 people. After the Nice attack, the so-called Islamic State promoted the modus operandi in *Rumiyah*—their online magazine dedicated to the indoctrination and empowerment of future attackers:

*“Vehicles are like knives, as they are extremely easy to acquire. But unlike knives, which if found in one’s possession can be a cause for suspicion, vehicles arouse absolutely no doubts due to their widespread use throughout the world. It is for this obvious reason that using a vehicle is one of the most comprehensive methods of attack, as it presents the opportunity for*

*just terror for anyone possessing the ability to drive a vehicle. Likewise, it is one of the safest and easiest weapons one could employ against the kuffar, while being from among the most lethal methods of attack and the most successful in harvesting large numbers of the kuffar. [...] The Ideal Vehicle: Load-bearing truck, large in size [...]*”

(Rumiyah, Nr. 3)

Four days before Anis followed the advice above, he was observed checking trucks for unlocked doors, perhaps a first dry run. On the day of his attack, he eventually gained a vehicle by assaulting the driver and shooting him in the head. At 8:02 pm the truck rolled into the well-attended Christmas market. Although the truck was only going 9 mph—a chain of lights had looped around one of the trucks axles and prevented acceleration—the speed was high enough to kill numerous human beings that evening.

After the truck stopped, Anis A. jumped out of the driver’s cabin. As he had noticed that a surveillance camera was filming him, he raised his index finger. Within the radical Islamist scene this hand signal means “there is only one god”. After his escape from the Netherlands he was

<sup>1</sup>Institute Psychology and Threat Management, Darmstadt, Germany.

<sup>2</sup>Department of Psychiatry, University of California, La Jolla, California.

eventually shot dead by a police task force near Milan, Italy, in the early hours of December, 23rd.

### Terrorist Developments and the Situation in Germany

Terrorist activities, as seen in Berlin, typically serve to enforce ideological, political, and religious motives and to generate attention for the extremist's objectives. While striving to provoke fear and consternation in society, terrorists are also keen to stage themselves as powerful to solicit sympathizers and motivate new recruits. From the history of extremism the authors have learned that state repression nearly always entails innovation on the radicals' side—this applies to Islamist, as well as to right wing extremism (Borstel and Heitmeyer 2012).

Thus, it was Louis B., former leader of the notorious Ku Klux Klan, who advised his followers 25 years ago to engage in the strategy of leaderless resistance:

*“With this in mind, current methods of resistance to tyranny employed by those who love our race, culture, and heritage must pass a litmus test of soundness. Methods must be objectively measured as to their effectiveness, as well as to whether they make the government's intention of repression more possible or more difficult. (...) Utilizing the Leaderless Resistance concept means all individuals and groups operate independently of each other, and never report to a central headquarters or single leader for direction or instruction, as would those who belong to a typical pyramid organization. (...) It goes almost without saying that Leaderless Resistance leads to very small or even one man cells of resistance. Those who join organizations to play “let's pretend” or who are “groupies” will quickly be weeded out. While for those who are serious about their opposition to federal despotism, this is exactly what is desired.”*

(Beam 1992)

At the beginning of the 20st century, equivalent calls were also circulated by Al Qaida and its affiliated groups. The Mujahedeen should not wait for instructions any longer but strike against the infidels whenever it was opportune. The strategy of leaderless resistance changed the face of terror: When it came to attacks in the West the organizations did not feel responsible for the detailed planning any longer. They saw themselves more as ideological suppliers and sanctioners, while lone operators and small cells eventually committed the violent attacks (Bakker and de Graf 2010).

Germany has had to deal with these kinds of plots. As one example, a 21-year-old former student, who radicalized himself to a great extent through the Internet, killed two US soldiers at Frankfurt Airport in 2011 (Böckler et al. 2016). The so-called “suitcase bombers,” two Lebanese students, acted as an autonomous cell. Fortunately, their bombs were not fully functional due to technical faults (Kulish 2008).

The Salafist scene, which has an enormous mobilizing power in Germany, has become a core breeding ground for radicalization processes. While intelligence agencies identified about 3800 members of the Salafist movement in 2011, there were already over 10,000 in 2017; about 1500 of them are classified as potentially violent (Landtag 2017).

This enormous increase is also due to the rise of the Islamic State and their easily digestible message of hate. In contrast to Al-Qaida, ISIS initially focused on building, enhancing, and ensuring its quasi national structure in Syria and Iraq. The organization advised Muslims from all over the world to immigrate to the Caliphate. About 900 people from Germany followed this call. However, since 2015 the number of Islamic motivated travelers has decreased significantly (BfV et al. 2016). Today, the Islamic State follows two militant strategies. On the one hand, as seen in Paris and Brussels, the organization utilizes jihadist cells in Europe to prepare attacks. Perpetrators are trained in ISIS camps in Syria, Iraq, and Libya and sent back to execute a terrorist attack. On the other hand, the following call of al A., former spokesman of the Islamic State, shows that the organization also counts on the strategy of leaderless resistance:

*“If you can kill a disbelieving American or European - especially the spiteful and filthy French—or an Australian, or a Canadian, or any other disbeliever from the disbelievers waging war, including the citizens of the countries that entered into a coalition against the Islamic State, then rely upon Allah and kill him in any manner or way however it may be. Do not ask for anyone's advice and do not seek anyone's verdict. Kill the disbeliever whether he is civilian or military, for they have the same ruling”*

(Al A., quoted from Hegghammer and Nesser 2015)

Again this call was followed in Germany on a number of occasions:

- In December 2016 a 12-year-old boy tried to detonate a nail bomb in the name of Islamist ideology in Ludwigshafen (Kirchner 2016).
- On July, 18th, 2016, a 17-year-old unaccompanied minor refugee set out to attack fellow passengers with a knife and a hatchet in a local train in Bavaria (Meloy and Pollard 2017).
- Six days later, the bomb of a 27-year-old Islamist exploded near a music festival in Ansbach, but only the perpetrator died (Eddy 2016).
- In January 2017, a 16-year-old girl named Safia S. was sentenced to 6 years in prison due to the stabbing of a federal policeman who was attacked as a representative of the Kuffar state (Dearden 2017).
- In April 2017, convert Marco G. was sentenced to life imprisonment because he had tried to commit a bomb attack at Bonn main station (Hall 2017).

### The Internet and the Strategy of Leaderless Resistance

Today the Internet is a significant tool to advance leaderless resistance—as a vehicle of terrorist messages, as an instrument for the mobilization and the recruitment of sympathizers, and a context where radicalization processes occur (Böckler and Allwinn 2017). With online magazines like Inspire, Al Qaida not only tries to attract potential recruits but also is keen to empower them to commit an attack in the West: for example, by publishing technical instructions like “how to build a bomb in the kitchen of your mom”. With sections like “Inspired by Inspire,” they pay homage to the

brothers and sisters who had successfully committed lone actor operations in the past—like the Boston Marathon Bombers, the attacker from Frankfurt airport, or two men who slaughtered a British soldier in London Woolwich. With “Rumiyah,” ISIS also publishes a medium which focuses on worshipping martyrs and on the empowerment of potential attackers (Böckler 2017).

In the past, radicalized cells and lone actors recurrently found inspiration in their predecessors and referred to them during their radicalization process. From a psychological point of view, narcissistic moments play a significant role in the course of such copycat effects (Hoffmann 2017). In this psychopathology of narcissism, a person cultivates phantasies of omnipotence and power to repel feelings of void and worthlessness. The phantasy to change the world by one’s own hand through violence may have a special attraction for people who are searching for means to compensate for self-doubts and in some cases clinical depression. With its propaganda material the Islamic State addresses these needs and encourages future perpetrators to act in the organization’s favor (Guadagno et al. 2010).

#### *Patterns of radicalization*

In Germany, there have been diverse groups of persons who have radicalized against the background of Islamist ideology. It ranges from school dropouts with broken homes, individuals with criminal pasts, to high school and university students whose parents were physicians or entrepreneurs.

Studies indicate that a majority of persons who radicalize within the jihadist milieu are between 14 and 35 years old (Bouhana and Wikström 2011). During this age period, developmental tasks aim for the consolidation of identity. For people with a migration background and with experiences of fleeing, the balancing act between two cultures will intensify these tasks. In contrast, persons who radicalize at advanced ages often suffer from acute crises and become uncertain of their self and their interpretations of the world. Ideologies may become attractive in these moments as they help to reduce social complexity—and therefore social anxiety—to define who is friend and who is foe and to elevate one’s own person against the background of a closed worldview. The connecting element between radicalized perpetrators is not a certain personality or social profile but a diffuse and highly subjective feeling of personal grievance where extremist messages find a fertile breeding ground.

By taking a closer look at perpetrator’s biographies, some general behavioral tendencies and psychological needs are distinguishable. After the 9/11 attacks, a group of forensic psychologists in the United States developed the concept of the “violent true believer” to support criminal investigations by providing security authorities with a model on the psychology of terrorist perpetrators. The violent true believer is an individual committed to acts of homicide and/or suicide to advance his particular political or religious beliefs (Meloy 2004, 2011; Meloy and Mohandie 2014). The violence is intended and often targets civilians who are considered culpable actors, unbelievers, or members of the out-group (Becker 1975) deserving of hatred and contempt. The violent true believer is not a homogeneous type. Earlier work has attempted to delineate subtypes, including the unwavering, affiliative, opportunistic, psychotic, criminal,

betrayor, and fledgling violent true believer (Hoffmann et al. 2015; Meloy 2011).

#### *ISIS related radicalization*

In this article the authors take a closer look at one subtype, the criminal true believer. Meloy (2004, 2011) describe perpetrators of this type as extremely venturesome. Within a group they usually attract attention with their impulsive and aggressive behavior. Taking all types of violent true believers into account, the criminal true believers spend the shortest time within a terrorist organization, for the simple reason that the organization often excludes them due to their impulsivity or because they meet their deaths early. Usually, they neither strongly believe in ideology nor do they invest much time in their religious beliefs. Therefore, they often do not have a profound interest in the cause they are fighting for. The leaders of the group like to use them to instill strict discipline within the group or carry out the most sadistically violent acts as this type of violent true believer is feared by most of the other members. The most feared criminal true believers are typically psychopaths.

When the authors look at those people who had radicalized against the background of ISIS ideology, they regularly identify backgrounds and dynamics that are in accordance with the subtype of the criminal true believer. Therefore, Basra and Neumann (2016, p. 7) refer to a “new-crime-terror-nexus” when studying ISIS-radicalization: “for the first time, there is complete alignment between a group like the Islamic State and the people who are attracted by its core countercultural message of redemption through strength, power, violence, and other illegal acts. Rather than in universities or among religious students, the Islamic State increasingly finds recruits in European ‘ghettos’, in prisons, as well as among the European ‘underclasses’ and those who have previously engaged in violence and other illegal acts. Those who have become part of the jihadist counterculture can use their criminal skills for terrorist purposes, circumventing the supposed ‘profit versus ideology’ dichotomy.” Among some counterterrorism investigators, this phenomenon is referred to as “gangster jihad.”

The background of foreign fighters from Germany support this observation: it has been shown that out of 669 people who travelled to Syria and Iraq about two-thirds had police records before their departure to the Middle East. About one-third of them had convictions. The crimes range from property, violent, sexual, and drug related crimes to politically motivated acts (Basra and Neumann 2016; BfV et al. 2016).

#### *Case study: Anis A. –a criminal true believer*

**Data and focus.** The study now turns to the radicalization process of Anis A., the attacker from Berlin, from a threat assessment perspective. White (2017, p. 22) argues that: “it is essentially unfair to code a true positive case after the fact, given the known information at the present time and the lack of such information just before the homicide.” But as White continues: “Post incident exercises, however, are valuable for learning.” Case studies help to understand the unique and commonly shared attributes of those who are ideologically motivated to commit violence and to work out behavioral patterns that might be valuable for future threat assessments.

The case study is based on an extensive qualitative analysis. The source material includes:

- An official investigation report which was published by the responsible parliamentary committee on April, 4th, 2017 (Landtag 2017).
- An official report on the state of knowledge and actions of German authorities in reference to the attacker Anis A. from April, 4th, 2011 to December, 21st, 2016 (Bundesministerium des Inneren and Bundesministerium für Justiz und Verbraucherschutz 2017).
- Findings from a journalism investigation team published on April, 5th, 2017. The journalists had access to thousands of pages of investigation files, observation protocols, and notes from intelligence agencies (Amjahid et al. 2017). They also conducted interviews with siblings of Anis A. For the case analysis, only media information was used that was verified by at least three other media sources.

While coding the material, the authors 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, his emotions, and his behavior.
- (2) Self-staging 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) Social networks and social reactions which 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.

### Early Years and Criminal Past of Anis A.

Anis A. was born in 1992 in the Tunisian province Kairouan, the youngest of nine children. After A.'s birth the family moved to Queslatia where his childhood was marked by severe poverty. His parents were living apart from each other. His mother took care of the children and worked as household help, while his father supplied vegetable shops with a donkey cart. Religion did not play a big role in the family's life nor did Anis show any interest in the Quran. "It did not matter to him if we had worn a hijab or not, if we had prayed or not," his sister said about her brother. She never talked with him about religion. "He used to drink, to party, and to hear pop music. He was a pretty normal guy."

Anis left school when he was 15 years old. From that day on, he dropped more and more into criminality—he committed several thefts and drug-related offenses. At the age of 12 he beat up other kids and stole their property. At 16 he threatened a truck driver and stole his vehicle for the first time. When a court sentenced him to 4 years in prison, he had already put himself in the hands of a trafficking gang and was moved to the small Italian Island of Lampedusa. The turmoil of the Arab Spring helped him to remain undetected by authorities.

In Europe Anis wanted to make as much money as possible before returning back to Tunisia. As he knew that it was much easier for minors to get a permit of residence, he gave a wrong date of birth to the authorities. In Sicily he lived in a Catholic dormitory. Although there were strict rules, Anis A. and others around him spent their time drinking and smoking. In October 2012, a dispute escalated; when Anis was drunk, he beat up a social worker and set the beds of the dormitory on fire. He was sentenced to 4 years in prison. Even in custody, he attacked prison officers and fellow inmates. He also threatened a Christian inmate with beheading; he had to be relocated to another prison about six times.

After his release in May 2015, Anis was scheduled to be deported to Tunisia but the officials in his home country did not confirm his identity: a procedure which was a necessary precondition for his expulsion. According to law, Italian authorities had to release him from custody after 30 days.

In July 2015 he set out to Freiburg in Germany and subsequently moved to Berlin, Dortmund, and Emmerich. During that time, Anis kept his head above water with occasional jobs. People around him reported that Anis always seemed to be angry. His former attorney and one of his brothers stated that all his life, Anis shifted the blame for his transgressions onto others.

Because of investigations in the context of a Salafist network, a liaison officer became aware of Anis due to his statements about "doing something in Germany." Anis became a recognized part of the German Salafist scene during that time in the towns of Dortmund, Berlin, and Hildesheim. Because of his involvement in the jihadist network and his behavioral patterns, German security authorities put him under observation as a potential attacker in February 2016. From that time on, he frequently was the subject of case conferences in which police and intelligence agencies exchanged information about him. However, they did not find any evidence that Anis A. would cross the threshold between talking and acting in the near future. Eventually the observation measures were terminated in November 2016, 1 month before his attack.

Obviously Anis did not perceive a conflict between his newly developed religiosity and his criminal life which he seamlessly continued. A few times he was observed selling drugs right in front of a mosque; he himself also took cocaine and amphetamine. In the middle of June 2016, Anis and two acquaintances stormed into a bar in Berlin, becoming the stage for a drug related conflict between rival groups that day. While one of the attackers stabbed his opponent with a knife several times, A. hit another man with a hammer in the face. As the bar in which the incident took place was controlled by an Arabic clan, Anis became worried about an act of revenge and decided to leave Germany. He was arrested near the Swiss border with two false Italian ID cards. After a temporary detention that could have resulted in his deportation to Tunisia, he was set free again because the responsible authorities did not verify his identity.

During his stay in Germany there were numerous investigative procedures against Anis A. due to different crimes, including aggravated theft, bodily injury, drug trade, document fraud, and fraudulent acquisition of services. Anis A. was not taken into custody since the crimes were not linked into one lawsuit—he was using nine different identities in Germany.

### *Pathway to targeted violence and other warning behaviors*

Without a doubt Anis A. can be classified as a criminal true believer, one of the eight subtypes of the “violent true believer” (Meloy 2004, 2011). For individuals with a strong dissociated personality (antisocial personality disorder in DSM-5), legal and moral codes are hardly relevant. Daily actions are driven by the maxim “it is right what feels right” (Endrass et al. 2015). Violence was a personal measure of success for Anis, a pursuit undeterred by subsequent criminal proceedings. Over time this behavior pattern became more and more chronic. There are manifold hints that in Anis’ case Salafist ideology rationalized his violence, but did not motivate his use of violence in general. His immersion into the Salafist scene directed his violence to more specific targets. A dissociated (antisocial) personality structure is not a specific risk factor for extremist violence, but the concept of the criminal true believer helps to develop an understanding of the inner logic of the case, as well as the psychological motives of the perpetrator.

### *Warning behaviors in the case of Anis A.*

Targeted violence is the result of a developing pathway which is accompanied by characteristic behavioral and communication features (Calhoun and Weston 2016). These perpetrators attract the attention of others, including threat assessors, and the further they move along a pathway toward violence, the greater the opportunity for direct observation of their pathway behavior.

A study on lone actor terrorists (Gill 2015) found that about 83% of the perpetrators attracted the attention of their social environment in the run up to their deed. In 79% of the cases people around the perpetrator recognized that he was devoted to an extreme ideology; in two-thirds of the cases the social environment even knew that the perpetrator was planning a violent act. In 58% of the cases, relatives were conscious of the fact that the perpetrator was not only speaking about the deed but also that he showed significant behavior that indicated research, planning, and preparation for a violent attack. In 59% of the cases, the perpetrator also produced statements within letters, videos, or manifestos to disseminate his intent. In the context of Islamist-motivated travelers from Germany to Syria and Iraq, social contacts clearly see the ongoing radicalization processes. In 2016, 53% of the radicalization processes were recognized by parents, friends, teachers, or social workers (BfV et al. 2016).

Such scientific insights do play a central role in threat management. Warning behaviors are activities the perpetrator engages in before the incident. They indicate that a person is likely mobilizing for targeted violence (Meloy et al. 2012). In recent times a proximal warning behavior typology has gained growing importance. It is sensitive to specific dynamics and changes in the current behavior and communication of a person while considering more static risk factors, such as criminal and mental disorder histories, as sensitive but not specific distal characteristics. The typology has also been applied to the assessment of terrorist violence (Meloy 2016; Meloy and Gill 2016). If a radicalization process is accompanied by warning behaviors, active case management is strongly suggested. In Anis A.’s case five categories of warning behavior were especially salient. In the following, the authors will take a closer look at them.

### *Identification*

The proximal warning behavior of identification is a key element in the course of radicalization. Identification is evident when any or all of the following features are present (Meloy et al. 2015a):

- (1) Self-staging and self-perception as a “pseudo-commando”
- (2) A “warrior mentality” suffused with violent and grandiose fantasies
- (3) A strong association with weapons and military topics
- (4) Identification with other attackers
- (5) Becoming an agent to advance a particular cause or belief system

The psychological benefit of identification is frequently self-exaltation in reference to notorious role models.

Before his immersion into the Salafist scene, Anis A. provoked his social environment by referring to ISIS symbols and narratives. For example, he removed crucifixes from the walls in the Catholic dormitory and installed the black flag of ISIS as a desktop picture on the central computer.

In October 2015, roommates in a refugee camp in Emmerich gave information to the Foreigners Registration Office that Anis A. bragged about his associates of the Islamic State; he showed several photos which depicted black clothed men looking like IS fighters. On one of the pictures there was a group of people holding black flags, grenades, hatches, and automatic rifles.

In summer 2015, Anis A. was already a solid part of the Salafist scene around a mosque in Hildesheim. It was controlled by one of the most influential ideologists of the Islamic State in Germany: the Iraqi Abu W. Abu W. and his representative Boban S. had the vision to impose Sharia Law in Germany by all means. A. was known as a devoted follower of both leaders, and people around him said that he was literally hanging on their every word. Anis A. felt especially attached to Abu W. who invited him regularly to private audiences to give him tips about immigrating to the Islamic State. In December 2015, Anis A. even took part in a 16-km long forced march which was organized by the Abu W. network. The recruits carried heavy luggage to demonstrate their strength and prepare themselves for the journey to the Islamic State. The activities impressively highlight Anis’ focus on militancy and his self-perception as a prototypical jihadi fighter. He had become a soldier for Allah.

Moroccan intelligence service also provided information to the German authorities that Anis A. had devoted himself to self-appointed caliph Abu Al B. and the Islamic State. In October 2016 there was information that he shared an accommodation with a member of the Islamic State in Berlin.

### *Fixation*

Fixation warning behavior is indicated by an increasing intensive (pathological) occupation with a person, a topic, or an issue. It is accompanied by deterioration in social and occupational functioning.

Anis A. spend a lot of time in Dortmund where Abu W.’s representative Boban S. set up a prayer room. In the last months of 2015, Anis focused more and more on ideological topics. He visited about 15 mosques on a regular basis—in

some of them he even acted as a prayer leader. From September 2016 on, ideological rules increasingly determined his actions. On his mobile phone investigators later found a great amount of porn films. The access protocol indicated that he had stopped watching them in October. From that point on he spent his time praying multiple times a day and intensively studying the Koran.

Within the communication structure of terrorist actors, a fixation is apparent in the increasing frequency of negative and disparaging comments, often on social media, toward groups or individuals considered unbelievers. In the beginning of 2016, Anis A. attracted more and more attention within his social environment—both virtual and terrestrial—with statements about the impiousness of all Europeans and the killing of infidels.

### Leakage

Anis A. was not only an injustice collector (O'Toole 2014) who was exploited by a jihadi network but also an identity seeker with significant narcissistic accentuations. In the course of his radicalization he recurrently showed leakage behavior. Leakage is a proximal warning behavior in which the subject communicates to a third party an intent to attack a target (Meloy and O'Toole 2011). The majority of lone actor terrorists will leak their intent to third parties (Meloy and Gill, 2016).

In November 2015 a liaison officer deployed in the context of investigations against the Abu W. network became aware of Anis A. Anis frequently boasted that he “wanted to do something in Germany.” He further stated that he was ready to fulfil his duty, that he would not hesitate to commit an attack, and that he would be able to access a Kalashnikov rifle without any problems. The liaison officer also shared his observation that Anis A. was praising the Belgium attacks and that the Tunisian implied he would commit a terroristic act with an explosive belt.

About 6 weeks before his deed, A. produced a video in which he vowed his loyalty to the Islamic State:

*“Finally I pledge to actively participate in Jihad against the enemies of Allah as much as I can. And to those infidels, who bomb the Muslims every day, I swear that we will hunt you and slaughter you like pigs for what you do to these Muslims. Did you think that what you do to them will go unpunished? There are masses of Muslims all over the world willing to avenge the Muslims you kill. And they will be avenged, for we are strong and determined to make you pay the price.”*

There are manifold hints that several people from Anis' immediate social circle knew about the impending attack. An example is his nephew Fadi with whom Anis had met several times shortly before the attack. Today he is in custody due to his potential joint knowledge of the terror attack.

### Last resort

In the run up to targeted violence there are often indications that the perpetrator felt increasingly bothered or desperate. These feelings may lead to the perception that a violent act is a necessary, logical, and imminent next step. A look at Anis' biography shows that he had frequently re-

jected alternatives to the use of violence; he was successively advancing his radicalization process over a period of at least 13 months. Besides his verbalized feelings of hate against Europe, people in his social surroundings noticed his gradual and growing frustration.

- Anis' former lawyer reported that after his imprisonment in 2011, Anis felt desperate because he knew that there would be no more chance for him to get a residence permit in Europe.
- His request of asylum in Germany was denied in May 2016 without justification.
- He was aware of the fact that he was on the radar of German security authorities. After the police in North Rhine Westphalia observed him discreetly for a long time, Berlin police arrested him in February 2016, took pictures of him, stored his fingerprints, and confiscated his mobile phone. As of this date, Anis was much more vigilant. He was always situationally alert and tried to impede others' observations by constantly changing routes, vehicles, and destinations—what are referred to as surveillance detection runs. The perceived pressure of persecution seemed to have sharpened his radicalization process over time.
- During the days after the attack at the cocktail bar in Berlin in June 2016, Anis A. contacted his family and told them that he had to leave Germany. He was afraid of the revenge of the Arabic Clan that was in control of the cocktail bar. As he was trying to flee, Anis A. was stopped at the Swiss border and sent back to Germany in August 2016.
- About 1 week after the attack, Anis would have had to leave his apartment due to the termination of his rental agreement. His landlord considered him to be an extremist.

These events may have accelerated the radicalization process and let Anis A. perceive a violent attack as necessary, legitimate, reasonable, and without any alternatives. Typically, it is much easier to identify triggers for a violent deed retrospectively, and no effort to date has detected any universally valid triggers. It is an interplay of individual perspectives, positive and negative social feedback processes (e.g., social amplifiers, feelings of power, and so on), the changing perception of opportunity costs, and biographical disruptions, which may become crystallization points for the pathways to severe targeted violence.

### Pathway

Pathway is a proximal warning behavior that indicates any kind of research, planning, preparation, or implementation of an attack (Calhoun and Weston 2016; Fein and Vossekuil 1998, 1999).

In March 2016 after an analysis of Anis A.'s mobile phone, investigators encountered a chat in which Anis stated—during a conversation with two members from ISIS in Libya—that he was prepared to commit a suicide attack. He was advised to get in touch with a contact in Germany and to inform him that he was prepared to serve Allah by all means. They finished the conversation with the words, “God will reunite us in paradise.” His contact person advised him to commit an attack in Germany after Anis had

stated that he wanted to immigrate to the Islamic State. Subsequently, on November, 10th, 2016, Anis A. was provided with a 143 page long PDF document in which the killing of old people, children, and women was legitimized. It is also a fact that Anis A. was still in contact with instructors of the Islamic State right before his attack.

There are several hints that the Berlin Christmas Market was a well selected target for Anis A. Investigators were able to trace his movement profile through his mobile phone. He had visited the Christmas market at Berlin Memorial Church on November, 22nd, 2016, for the first among seven times. About 1 week before the attack he also filmed a short sequence with his mobile phone during one of his stays. Moreover, he had visited the river banks several times where he eventually killed a truck driver and took his vehicle on December 19th. Anis A. had entered the address of the Christmas Market in his mobile navigation system before driving off.

### Summary and Conclusion

Soon after his arrival in Germany, Anis A. became a subject of investigation. Since 2011 the German Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Justice listed an estimated 106 entries concerning Anis. By February 2016, security authorities had ordered observation and telecommunication surveillance of him. In Germany there is a joint Center where all security agencies relevant to counterterrorism work have a seat, including state and federal offices of investigation, as well as state and federal offices for the protection of the Constitution, the Federal Intelligence Service, and the Chief Federal Prosecutor. During these conferences Anis A. was a topic of discussion several times. However, there was strong disagreement among the agencies about the risk he posed. Eventually the opinion prevailed that no acute threat from Anis A existed. Surveillance was stopped in November 2016, a month before the attack.

Anis A was a subtype of violent true believer called a criminal true believer. In this brief case study, the authors have traced his psychological and social history of radicalization and, most importantly, five proximal warning behaviors that occurred before and correlated with his attack: leakage, fixation, identification, last resort, and pathway warning behavior. In a recent study of 111 lone actor terrorists (Meloy and Gill, 2016), these five warning behaviors were apparent in 85%, 77%, 77%, and 28% of the cases, respectively. The pathway to targeted violence in this sample was apparent in 80% of the cases.

In the case of Anis A. there was an enormous amount of information that had to be assessed and prioritized. It will become increasingly important in the future that officials fall back on evidence-based and validated evaluation criteria. It is for this reason that both the development and implementation of structured risk and threat assessment instruments, as well as the scientific debate about them, are highly desirable. There are currently three publicly available instruments for the assessment of terrorist radicalization and targeted violence risk: the VERA 2 (Violent Extremism Risk Assessment) (Pressman Flockton 2012), ERG-22+ (Extremism Risk Guidance) (Silke 2014), and the TRAP-18 (Terrorist Radicalization Assessment Protocol) (Meloy et al. 2015b). The latter one includes the warning behavior typology.

The establishment and validation of these instruments not only takes us a step further toward a scientifically based standard in the assessment of radicalization processes but also it supports decisions concerning the use of limited resources regarding monitoring and case management. This is especially crucial due to the rise of people radicalizing within the simple elements of IS ideology in a relatively short time.

The use of these instruments by threat assessment and management teams in both the public and private sector is recommended. Such teams, ranging from government counterterrorism units to universities and corporations, are increasingly faced with ideologically motivated threats from religious and secular groups on the left and the right. The combination of threat teams and structured professional judgment instruments can provide for efficient use of resources in the face of real threats and help ameliorate concern in the face of perceived threats which do not in fact exist.

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Address correspondence to:

Nils Böckler, Dipl Päd  
 Institute Psychology and Threat Management  
 Postbox 11 07 02  
 Darmstadt 64222  
 Germany

E-mail: [nils.boeckler@i-p-bm.de](mailto:nils.boeckler@i-p-bm.de)