

# Assessing the Risk of Lone Actor Terrorism: TRAP-18

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# Lone Terrorist (actor, offender)

- Research, planning, preparation, and implementation of an act of terrorism without any external command or control
- May operate in pairs, but usually alone



# TRAP-18: Terrorist Radicalization Assessment Protocol

- What it is:
  - A Structured Professional Judgment Instrument (SPJ)



# TRAP-18:

## Proximal Warning Behaviors (8)

- Pathway
- Fixation
- Identification
- Novel aggression
- Energy burst
- Leakage
- Directly communicated threat
- Last resort behavior

# TRAP-18:

## Distal Characteristics (10)

- Personal grievance and moral outrage
- Framed by an ideology
- Failure to affiliate
- Dependence on the virtual community
- Thwarting of occupational goals

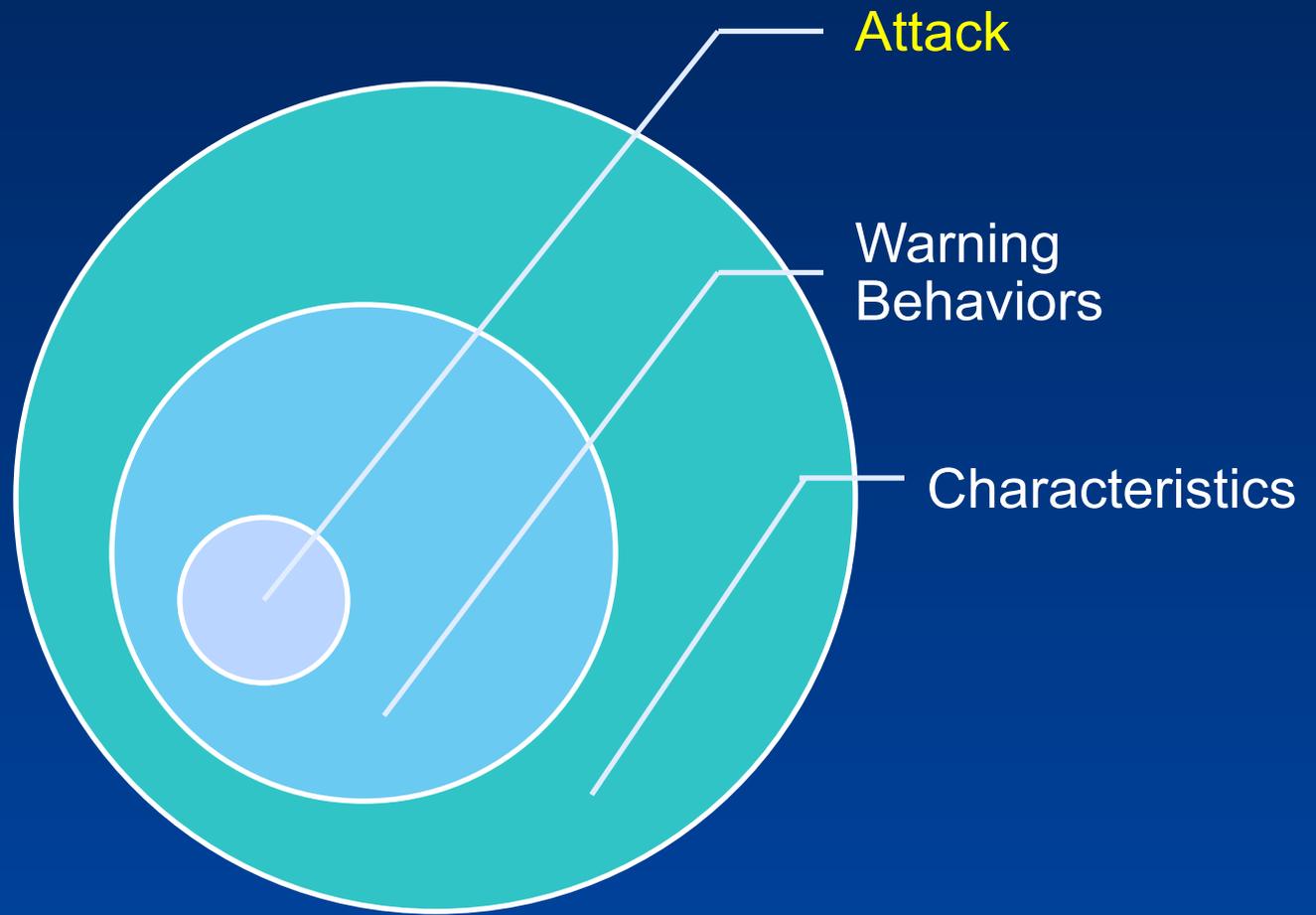


# TRAP-18:

## Distal Characteristics (10)

- Changes in thinking and emotion
- Failure of sexual pair-bonding
- Mental disorder
- Creative and innovative
- History of criminal violence





# TRAP-18 Manual

- Manual available from [gifrinc.com](http://gifrinc.com)
- Codesheets available from Dr. Meloy
  - English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Norwegian, Swedish, Dutch, German, Danish, and Arabic



# TRAP-18:

## Warning Behaviors

- Pathway
- Fixation
- Identification
- Novel aggression
- Energy burst
- Leakage
- Directly communicated threat
- Last resort behavior



# Warning Behaviors

- Patterns of behavior rather than individual risk factors: *pattern analysis*
- Origins in German gestalt psychology (Wertheimer, Koffka, Kohler)
- Proximally related to violence



# Gestalt Psychology

- How can I read these words without my vowels?

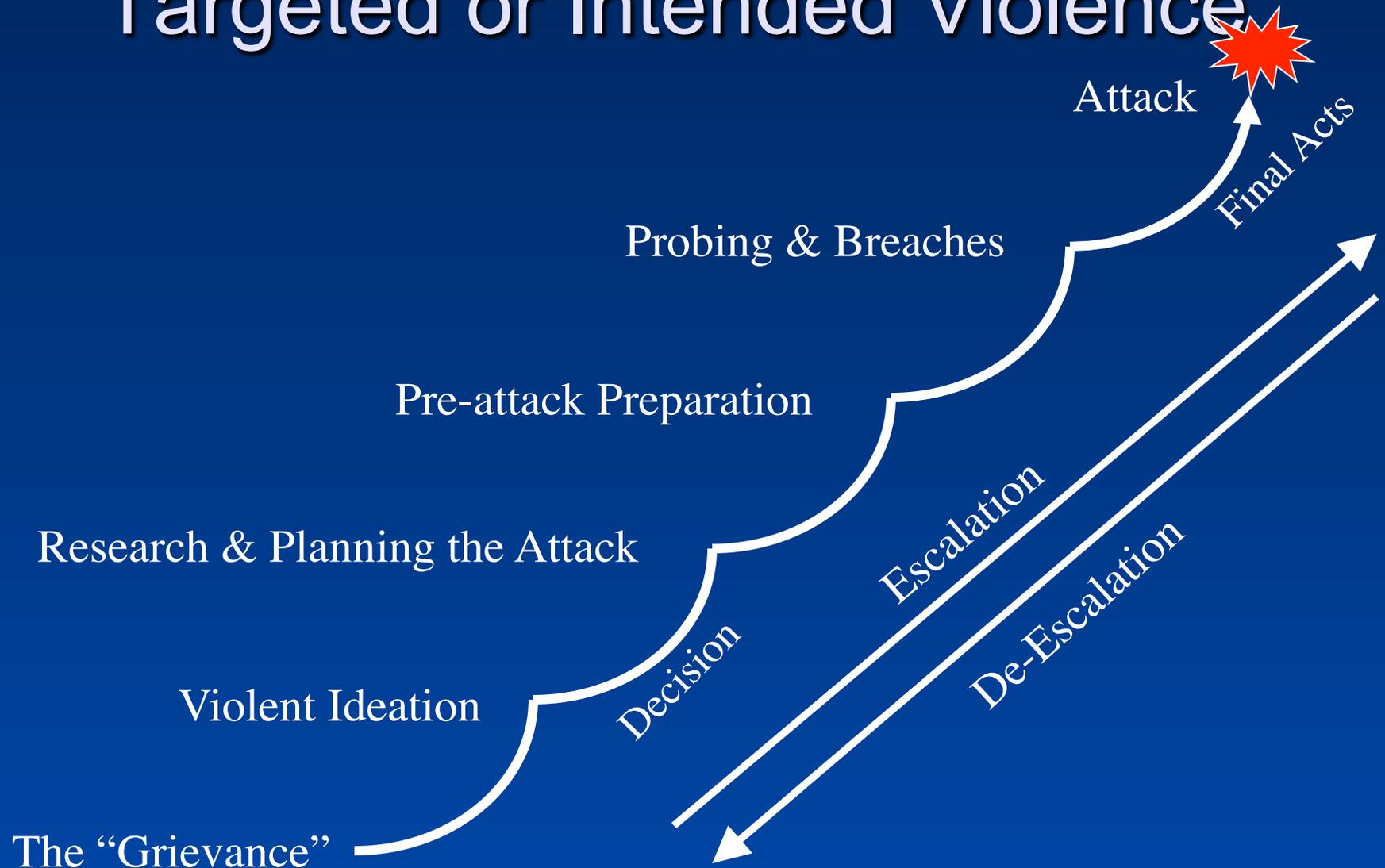


# Pathway Warning Behavior

Any behavior that is part of research, planning, preparation, or implementation of an attack (Fein & Vossekuil, 1998, 1999; Calhoun & Weston, 2003)



# Pathway to Targeted or Intended Violence



Adapted with permission from F.S. Calhoun and S.W. Weston (2003). *Contemporary threat management: A practical guide for identifying, assessing and managing individuals of violent intent.*

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# Sirhan Sirhan Background

- Raised in Palestine during establishment of State of Israel
- Witnessed killings, including brother
- Physically abused by father
- Moved to Pasadena area when 12
- Father abandoned family at 13
- Lost sister to illness in late adolescence
- Wanted to be a jockey, but injured
- Idealized RFK as father figure



# The Assassination of Robert F. Kennedy, June 5, 1968

- ***Grievance***—Kennedy votes for the purchase of 50 Phantom fighter bombers by Israel (Jan. 9-10)
  - ***Ideation***—“RFK must die” in diary
  - ***Research and Planning***—vows to complete the act before the first anniversary of the Six Day War
- 

- Tells a trash collector he is going to kill Kennedy
- ***Preparation***—begins practicing at a shooting range with .22 revolver
- “My determination to eliminate RFK is becoming...more of an unshakeable obsession” (May 18)



- ***Breach***—four stalking attempts (May 20, May 24, June 1, June 2)
- Practices rapid fire shooting at range, leaves at 5 p.m., June 4
- Eats dinner, goes to Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles, has four alcoholic drinks
- Hides in the pantry



- **Attack**--12:15 a.m., steps from behind a food tray rack
- “Kennedy, you son of a bitch!!!”
- 8 rounds fired, three wounds
- Fatal wound in right hemisphere of cerebellum



- 77 people in pantry
- 5 others wounded
- Kennedy died 25 hours later

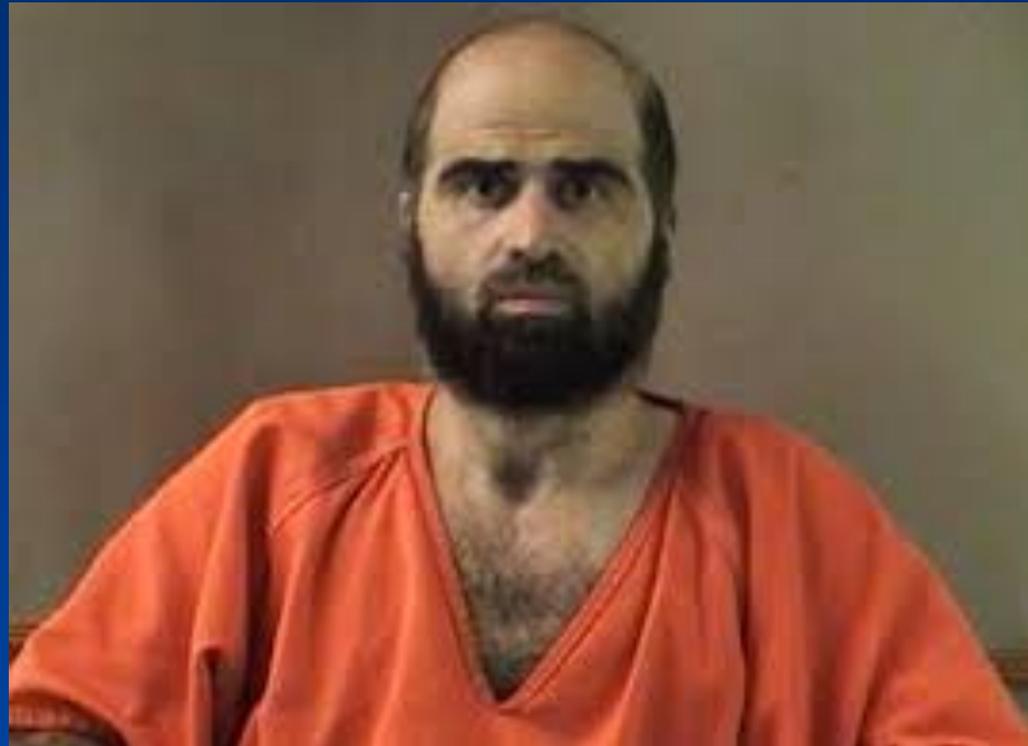


# Fixation Warning Behavior

Any behavior that indicates an increasingly pathological preoccupation with a person or a cause (Mullen et al., 2009). It typically causes deterioration of social and occupational functioning.



# Malik Hasan



# Pathological Fixation

- During psychiatric residency and fellowship (2003-2009) at Walter Reed gave three presentations which focused upon Muslims in the military, with no regard for the psychiatric purpose of these talks.
- This disjuncture illustrates his fixation.
- His social and occupational life also was clearly deteriorating.



# Identification Warning Behavior

Any behavior that indicates a psychological desire to be a “pseudocommando” (Dietz, 1986; Knoll, 2010), have a “warrior mentality” (Hempel et al., 1999), closely associate with weapons or other military or law enforcement paraphernalia, identify with previous attackers or assassins, or to identify oneself as an agent to advance a particular cause or belief system.

--Meloy JR, Mohandie K, Knoll J, Hoffmann J. (2015).  
The concept of identification in threat assessment. Behavioral Sciences and the Law. DOI: 10.1002/bsl.2166.





THE TREE OF  
LIBERTY

4296

# Anders Breivik



# Identification

**Behavioral Health - Mental Health - Life Skills**

**Nidal Hasan, MD, MPH**  
SoA(SWT) ←  
Psychiatrist

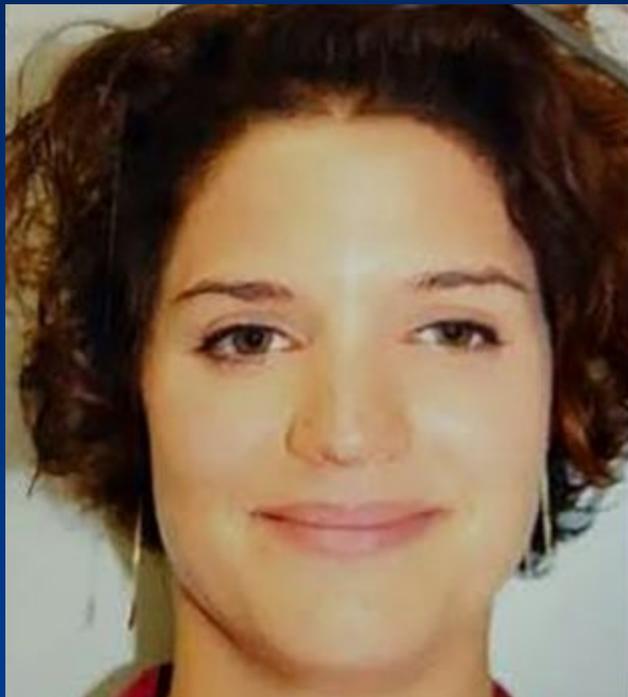
Contact Number: 301-547-1599  
E-mail: [NidalHasan@aol.com](mailto:NidalHasan@aol.com)

# Novel Aggression Warning Behavior

An act of violence which appears unrelated to any targeted violence pathway warning behavior which is committed for the first time. It is typically done to test the subject's ability to carry out his or her act of terrorist violence.



# Larossi Abballa



# Novel aggression

- Larossi Abballa, a 25 year old French citizen of Moroccan descent, killed a police officer and his wife on June 14, 2016 in their home in Magnanville, France. The prosecutor said that Abballa appeared to be operating on a general order from al-Baghdadi, the leader of the Islamic State, to kill “miscreants at home with their families” during Ramadan. Immediately following the killings, he started a live Facebook chat explaining his behavior while the couple’s toddler son wandered in the background. He was subsequently killed by the police when they entered the home.



# Novel aggression

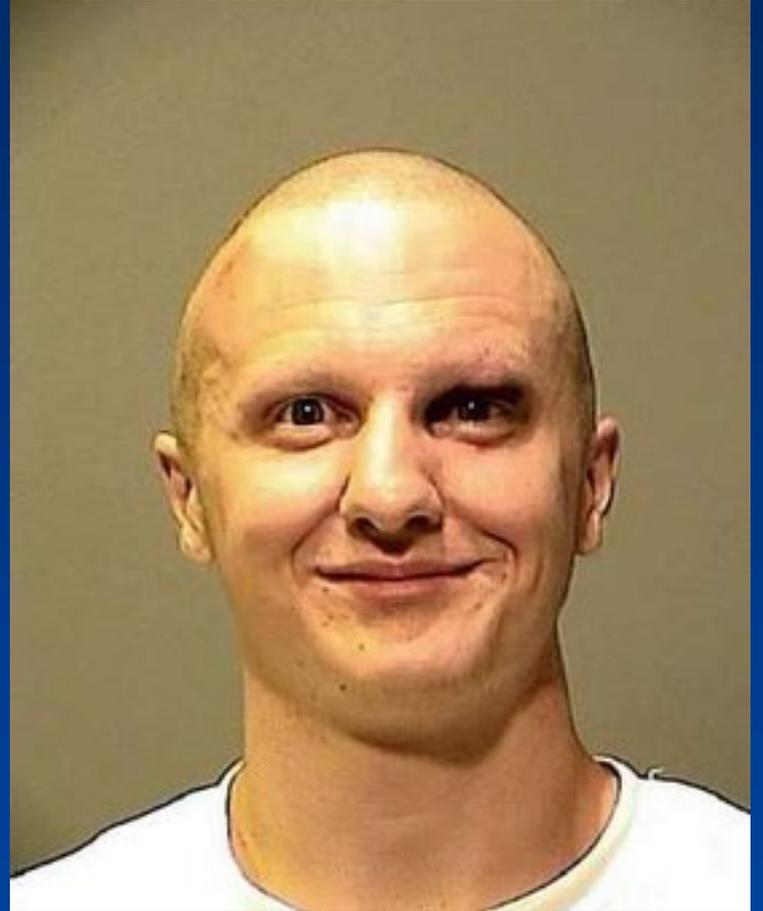
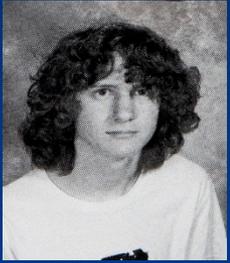
- “The first time Larossi Abballa appeared on the radar of French terrorism investigators, the only act of violence they could pin on him was killing bunnies. He had joined a small group of men, all bent on waging jihad, on a trip to a snowy forest in northern France five years ago, when he was 19. There, they videotaped themselves slaughtering the rabbits, bought so the men could grow used to the feel of killing” (R. Callimachi, New York Times, June 22, 2016, p A1).



# Energy Burst Warning Behavior

An increase in the frequency or variety of any noted activities related to the target, even if the activities themselves are relatively innocuous, usually in the hours, days or weeks before the attack (Odgers et al., 2009). Social media activity may increase or decrease during this period of time.





# Energy Burst Warning Behavior, January 7-8, 2011

- Drops off 35 mm film at Walgreen's evening of Jan. 7 before midnight
- Checks into Motel 6 shortly after midnight
- Searches web for "assassins" and "lethal injection"
- 0219 picks up photos, makes a purchase



# Jared Loughner

- Leaves telephone message with friend
- 0412 posts to Myspace page photo of Glock 19 and words, “Goodbye friends.”
- 0600 visits Walmart and Circle K stores



# Energy Burst (cont'd)

- Unable to purchase ammunition at first Walmart, purchases 9 mm full metal jacket ammo and diaper bag at 0727
- Stopped by police officer for running a red light
- Confronted by father at home, runs away
- Returns to Circle K, gets a cab, goes to supermarket where he insists on getting correct change for cab ride



# Energy Burst (cont'd)

- Sixteen minutes later, opens fire at 10:10, killing 6 and wounding 13 people
- Tackled by 3 senior citizens when he attempts to reload



# Leakage Warning Behavior

The communication to a third party of an intent to do harm to a target through an attack. The third party may be an Internet audience and/or any social media audience (Meloy & O'Toole, Behavioral Sciences and the Law, 29:513-527, 2011).

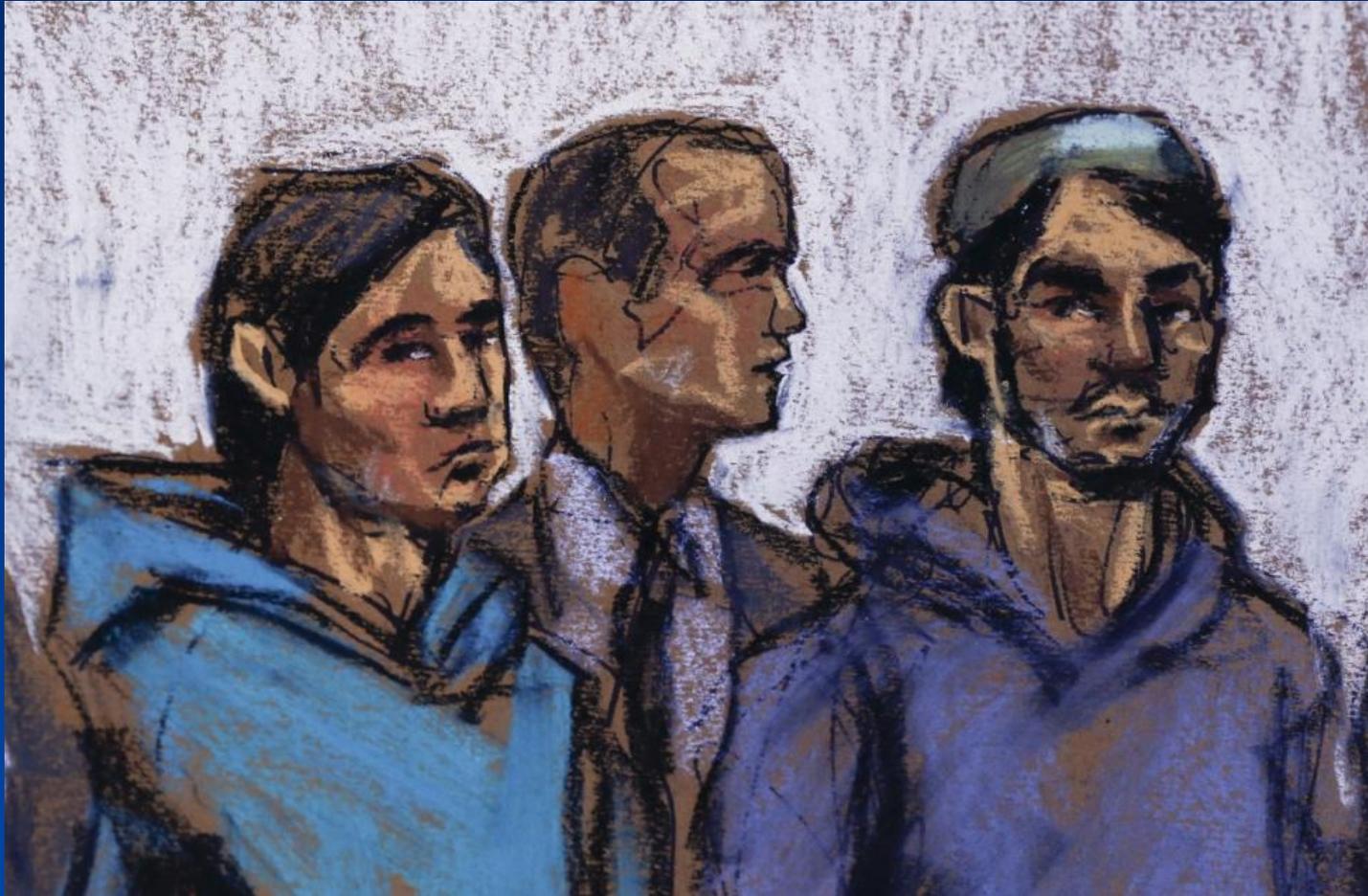


# Open Source Social Media

- “Greetings!....I am in USA now but we don’t have any arms. But is it possible to commit ourselves as dedicated martyrs anyway while here? What I’m saying is to shoot Obama, and then get shot ourselves, will it do? That will strike fear in the hearts of infidels.”
  - Abdurasul Juraboev, Hilofatnews.com, Aug. 8, 2014



# Federal District Court, Feb., 2015



# Last Resort Warning Behavior

Evidence of a “violent action imperative” or “time imperative” (Mohandie & Duffy, 1999). It may be a signal of desperation or distress. Often the result of an unexpected triggering event, or one which is anticipated, that involves a loss in love and/or work. The subject believes he has no other choice and must act now.





- “I have no choice. I am not in the position to, alone, go into the ghetto and fight. I chose Charleston because it is most historic city in my state, and at one time had the highest ratio of blacks to Whites in the country. We have no skinheads, no real KKK, no one doing anything but talking on the internet. Well someone has to have the bravery to take it to the real world, and I guess that has to be me.”

# Directly Communicated Threat Warning Behavior

The communication of a direct threat to the target or law enforcement beforehand.



# Stockholm, Dec. 11, 2010

- “Now, your children—daughters and sisters—will die like our brothers and sisters and children are dying...our actions will speak for themselves. As long as you do not end your war against Islam and the insult against the prophet and your stupid support for that pig Vilks...”



# Taimour al-Abdaly

- 28 year old Iraqi Sunni
- Emigrated to Sweden age 10
- Attended university in UK
- Detonated a car, and a few minutes later, blew himself up with a pipe bomb 200 meters away



نحن فرسان لنا الخيل مهود  
ان دعى داعي اجبنا للنداء

نفجير السوبد

من سبفعلها  
غير فرسان

دولة العراق الإسلامية

أحد فرسان دولة العراق الإسلامية  
الذي  
نفذ نفجير السوبد

<http://occident.blogspot.com>

# TRAP-18: Distal Characteristics

- Personal grievance and moral outrage
- Framed by an ideology
- Failure to affiliate with extremist or other group
- Dependence on the virtual community
- Thwarting of occupational goals



# TRAP-18: Distal Characteristics

- Changes in thinking and emotion
- Failure of sexual pair-bonding
- Mental disorder
- Creative and innovative
- Criminal violence



# Does TRAP-18 work in the real world?

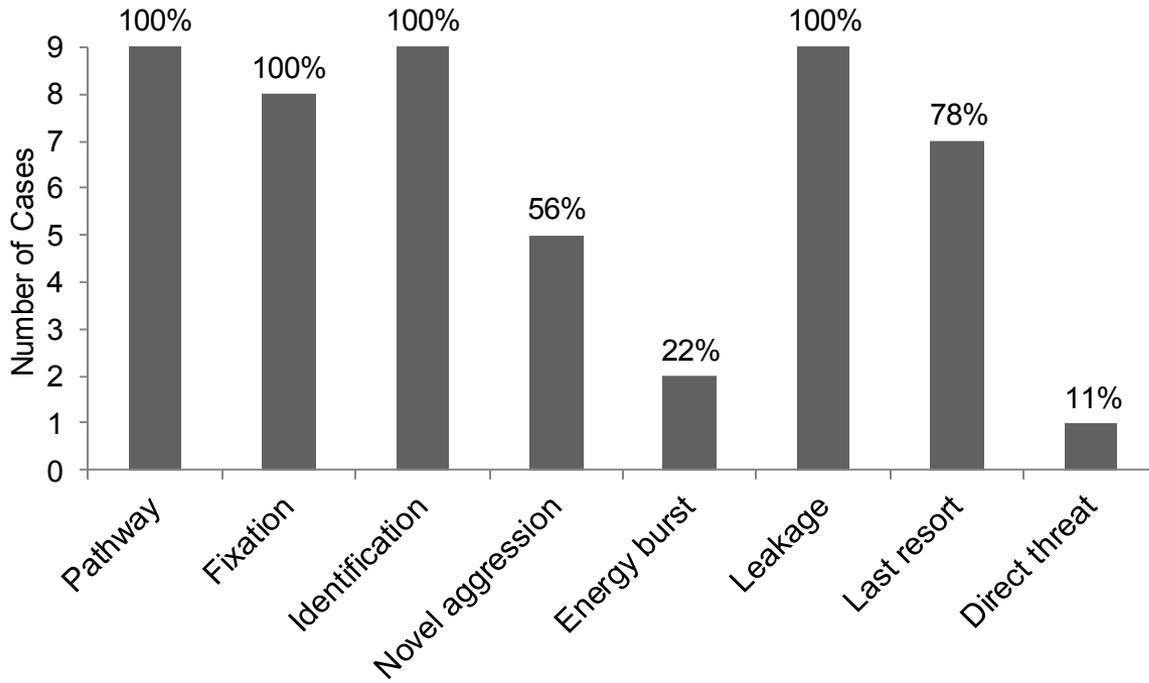
## Validation studies



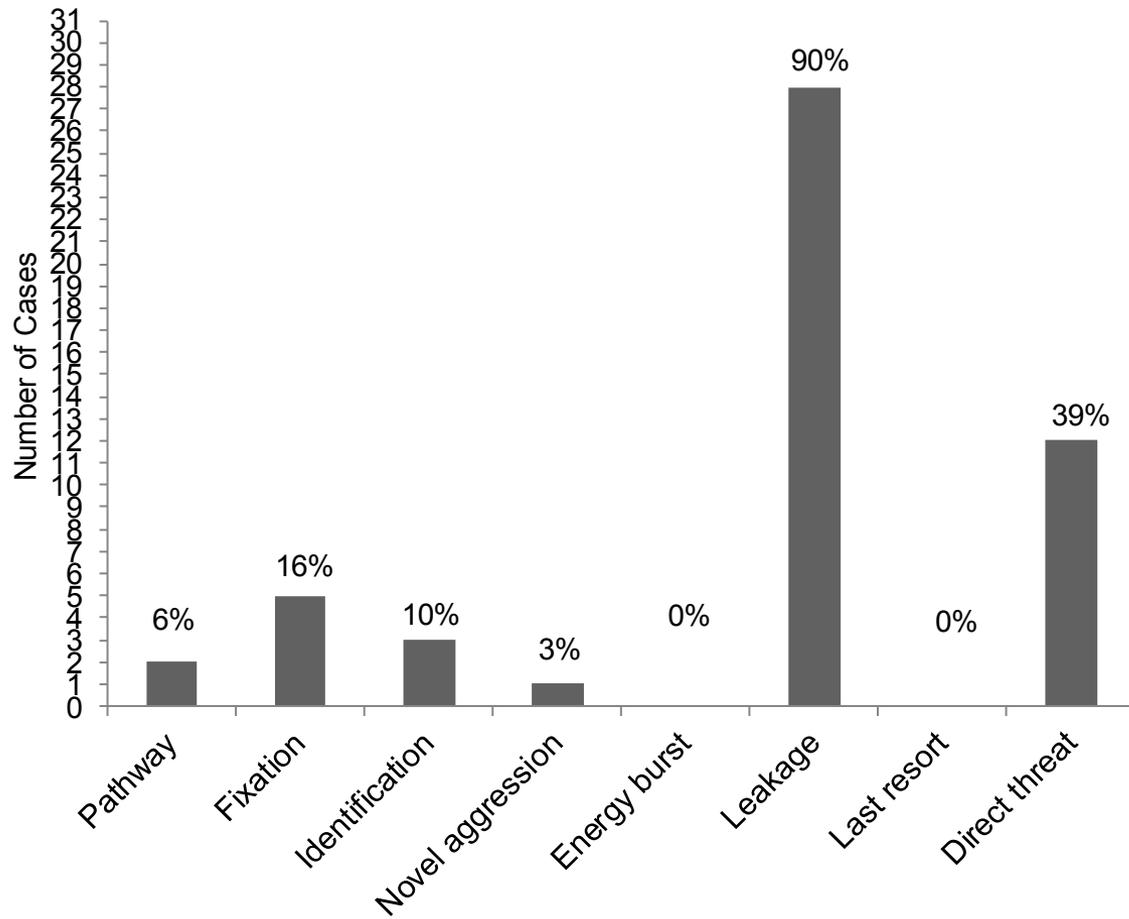
# Comparison of German School Shooters and Other Students of Concern, JTAM, 2014

- 1999-2010
  - All male, ages 15-23
  - 37 victims killed, 78% used a firearm
  - 56% former students who returned
  - Students of concern aged 16-22, 89% current students, none planned to attack
- 

## School Shooters (N=9)



## Other Students of Concern (N=31)



# Comparison of shooters and other students of concern

## Shooters, greater frequency of:

- Pathway
- Fixation
- Identification
- Novel aggression
- Last resort

## Effect size (phi coefficients)

- 0.61-0.875 (large)
- $p < .001$
- Fisher exact test due to small sample sizes

\*Meloy et al. (2014). J Threat Assessment and Management

# Meloy & Gill (N=111 lone terrorists), JTAM, 3:37-52, 2016

- U.S. and Europe
- Convicted of their active planning or died during commission of their attack
- 1990-2014 (25 years)
- “the use of threat or action designed to influence the government or intimidate the public and/or advance a political, religious, or secular cause.”



# Method

- Utilized Gill codebook to identify data which would allow for coding of TRAP-18 variables as present or absent
- Coded entire sample
- Compared across ideologies
- Compared across thwarted or successful attacks



# Lone Actor Terrorists

- Pathway 80%
- Fixation 77%
- Identification 77%
- Novel Aggression 17%
- Energy Burst 8%
- Leakage 85%
- Last Resort 28%
- Directly Communicated Threat 22%

# Lone Actor Terrorists

- Personal grievance and moral outrage 78%
- Framed by an ideology 100%
- Failure to affiliate with extremist group 29%
- Dependence on virtual community 49%
- Thwarting of occupational goals 55%
- Changes in thinking and emotion 88%
- Failure of sexual intimate pair bonding 84%
- Mental illness 41%
- Creativity and innovation 29%
- Criminal violence by history 30%



# Operational Application

- 70% demonstrated at least half of the TRAP variables
- >76% had 4 warning behaviors: pathway, fixation, identification, and leakage
- >77% had 4 distal characteristics: personal grievance and moral outrage, ideological frame, changes in thinking and emotion, failure of sexual pair bond



# Comparison of Ideologies

- Jihadist (n=38)
- Extreme right wing (n=43)
- Single issue (n=30)



# Comparative Ideologies

- Equivalence across all variables except for four:
  - Personal grievance and moral outrage
  - Dependence on the virtual community
  - Fixation
  - Thwarting of occupational goals



# Operational Application

- **TRAP-18 appears to be useful regardless of ideology driving the terrorist motivation**



# Successful v. Thwarted Attackers

- Successful (n=67): carried out the attack
- Thwarted (n=44): plots that were developed by a lone terrorist and then were interrupted/stopped by law enforcement intervention and led to a conviction



# Successful Attackers

- Less likely pathway warning behavior (phi=.264)
- More likely to fail at sexual-intimate pair bonding (phi = .293)
- More likely to be creative and innovative (phi = .190)
- More likely to be fixated (phi = .204)
- Less likely to be dependent on the virtual community (phi = .317)

# Operational Application

- More socially isolated, more time to plan and prepare without interruption
- Need to think “outside the box” as threat assessors for innovative (not done before) tactics
- Watch for indications of obsessive preoccupation with a cause, most likely through social media *postings*
- Pathway behavior less apparent: secrecy, luck, or inadequate intelligence?
- Less *interaction* with like minded true believers through listservs, blogs, etc.

# North American lone actor terrorists vs. others of concern

- Retrospective coding of attackers (n=33) and comparative group (n=23) who were successfully risk managed or false positives upon investigation
- Unpublished data; currently being written for submission to journal
- Moderate to large effect sizes



# Correlates for Violence Risk

- **Proximal warning behaviors**
  - Pathway
  - Identification
  - Energy burst
  - Last resort
  - Directly communicated threat (neg effect)



# Correlates for Violence Risk

- **Distal characteristics**
  - Ideology
  - Changes in thinking and emotion
  - Mental disorder (neg effect)
  - Greater creativity and innovation



# Monahan and Steadman, 1996

- Violent storms and violent people.  
American Psychologist 51:931-938
- **Watching**—cluster of distal characteristics > monitor the case
- **Warning**—one proximal warning behavior > actively manage the case
- Code warning behaviors first



# Current TRAP Operational Use

- CT investigators and analysts in US, Canada, and various European countries
- No official endorsement due to proprietary nature of TRAP-18
- Validation and pilot testing studies currently ongoing in UK and USA
- Licensed to Multihealth Systems Inc.



# TRAP-18: Proximal Warning Behaviors

- Pathway
- Fixation
- Identification
- Novel aggression
- Energy burst
- Leakage
- Directly communicated threat
- Last resort behavior



# TRAP-18: Distal Characteristics

- Personal grievance and moral outrage
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- Dependence on the virtual community
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# TRAP-18: Distal Characteristics

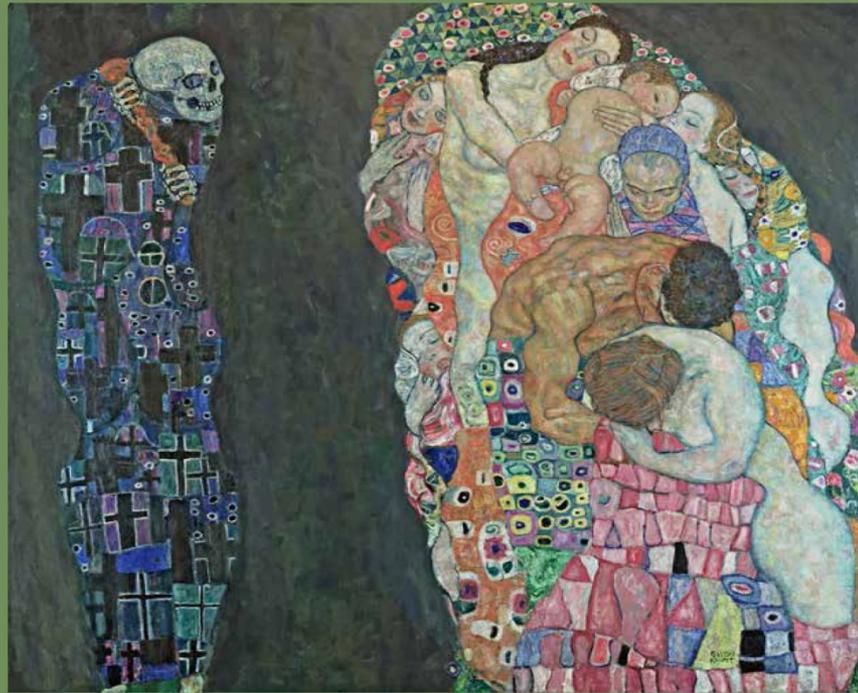
- Changes in thinking and emotion
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# Eric Hoffer, The True Believer, 1951

- “The vanity of the selfless, even those who practice utmost humility, is boundless.”





# INTERNATIONAL HANDBOOK OF THREAT ASSESSMENT

EDITED BY **J. REID MELOY** AND **JENS HOFFMANN**

OXFORD

# Thank you

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