

# Troubled Waters: Domestic Terrorism Threat in the U.S. Coast Guard and the TRAP-18

Aleksandra M. Dmitrieva<sup>1</sup> and J. Reid Meloy<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Psychology, University of California San Diego

<sup>2</sup> Department of Psychiatry, University of California San Diego

The interdiction and criminal prosecution of a subject who arguably posed a risk of terrorism is studied through the lens of the Terrorist Radicalization Assessment Protocol (TRAP-18). Christopher Hasson, an active member of the U.S. Coast Guard, was arrested and prosecuted in light of his extremist activities and was found guilty on multiple federal drug and gun charges in 2019. He expressed strong white supremacist, neo-Nazi, and other far-right ideology in his writings and online research, admired infamous mass murderers, created a list of potential targets, and accumulated weapons while suffering from an opioid use disorder. An estimate of actual risk can be determined through an open-source intelligence analysis of his pre-arrest proximal warning behaviors and distal characteristics when compared to other samples of lone actor terrorists. We coded Mr. Hasson for 5 of 8 proximal warning behaviors and 7 of 10 distal characteristics on the TRAP-18, many of which are the most commonly present indicators in successful attackers across North America and Europe. A formulation of the case is then dependent on the individualizing of risk through a determination of the relevance and weight of the indicators in any one case. Such a formulation, guided by questions following the coding of the case, helps determine both the tactics and long-term strategy for management. The preventive nature of this case provides an opportunity to test the ecological validity of the TRAP-18 for use by counterterrorism professionals who must make such interdiction judgments—both their timing and nature—in every case they encounter.

### **Public Significance Statement**

The TRAP-18, a threat assessment tool, was applied to a case where a potential domestic terrorist was interdicted before he was able to commit an attack. Applying the TRAP-18 in a situation where it is unknown whether an attack would or would not have occurred provides further evidence of the tool's validity and its usefulness in assessing people of concern.

*Keywords:* terrorism, violence risk, threat assessment, insider threat

Aleksandra M. Dmitrieva  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4891-5897>

J. Reid Meloy  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3826-332X>

J. Reid Meloy receives income from the TRAP-18 Assessment Instrument as well as from the training of this instrument.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Aleksandra M. Dmitrieva, Department of Psychology, University of California San Diego, 9500 Gilman Dr., La Jolla, CA 92093-0109, United States. Email: [admitrie@ucsd.edu](mailto:admitrie@ucsd.edu)

In the United States, a large subset of ideologically motivated violence stems from far-right extremism (Capellan, 2015). Domestic right-wing terrorists have committed over 500 attacks since 1970 (Piazza, 2017), and right-wing extremists were responsible for 76% of domestic extremist-related murders from 2010 to 2019 (Anti-Defamation, 2020). The Center for Strategic and International Studies reports that 67% of domestic terror attacks and plots between January 1 and August 31, 2020, were committed by

far-right extremists (Jones et al., 2020). Since 2014, far-right attacks have increased by 250%, and deaths have increased by 709% (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2020).

This national problem is ever on the rise, and as political division grows in the United States, so does the presence of hate groups, with over 800 hate groups being tracked in the United States in 2020 (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2020). Adamczyk et al. (2014) suggest that the mere presence of hate groups strongly correlates with far-right ideological violence.

A specific subset of right-wing terrorism manifests in lone actor attacks where an ideologically motivated far-right extremist does not have a formal attachment to a specific group or organization. These loners are more likely to perpetrate an attack (Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 2021), and are typically more successful than far-right groups or cells in carrying out an attack (Klein et al., 2016). Lone actor terrorism poses a serious and complex threat in the United States, with many offenders combining their personal grievances with broader political or social beliefs to create their own ideologies.

Although far-right extremism often covers a large spectrum of political and social beliefs, certain overarching themes appear more than others in the ideologies of those who commit attacks. Far-right terrorists are predominantly white and male (Gruenewald & Pridemore, 2012), and many ascribe to white supremacist or neo-Nazi ideology, often displaying outrage at the increased societal emphasis on diversity and inclusion of women, people of color, and religious minorities (Piazza, 2017). This anger at societal changes reflects a common far-right desire to return to an idealized past when minorities and “newcomers” in society did not pose as much of a perceived threat (Quek, 2019), a time when white, cisgender, heterosexual men were fully dominant in the United States, which many white supremacists conceptualize as a “white nation.” A common idea within the white nationalist/supremacist movement is the white homeland, the necessity for a geographical location where the white race can thrive without being polluted by non-Aryan races (Perliger, 2020; Perry & Blazak, 2010). Over the past few years, American white nationalists have become more open about their beliefs and desires within the movement and for the country, with events such as the 2017 “Unite the Right” rally at the

University of Virginia demonstrating the size of the movement as well as their honest beliefs (Atkinson, 2018). In addition, many right-wing groups subscribe to the racist ideology of Christian Identity, which teaches that European whites can be traced back to Adam and Eve, while Jews are the Satanic offspring of Eve and the serpent, and non-whites are “mud people” (Christian Identity, n.d.; Miller-Idriss, 2020; Perliger, 2020).

Within the far-right movement, white nationalism often goes hand in hand with the religious right and so-called Christian nationalism, with many members of this community subscribing to the belief that the United States should be a wholly Christian nation. With the increased convergence of religious and national identities for many in the United States, Christian nationalists are less tolerant toward out-groups, more protective of in-group boundaries, and thus more likely to profess explicit and implicit racist and xenophobic views (Davis, 2018a, 2018b; Hall et al., 2010; McDaniel et al., 2011; Perry & Whitehead, 2015; Perry et al., 2018). Christian religious radicalism remains a strong ideology within right-wing extremism and has been responsible for multiple terror attacks (Perliger, 2020; Piazza, 2017). The signs and symbols of Christian nationalism were also prominent during the Capitol siege on January 6, 2021.

Another common far-right trope is strong anti-government sentiment. Many adherents revile the idea of a big government and consider the current U.S. political system tyrannical, corrupt, and uncaring about individual citizens’ rights and liberties (Piazza, 2017). Often, far-right extremists also believe that the government is colluding with minorities or other groups they hate to oppress the white population, whereas others think the government is not interpreting the Constitution as literally as it should be (Holt et al., 2020). A study by Parkin et al. (2015) analyzed 141 homicides perpetrated by far-right extremists killed in the United States between 1990 and 2007. Out of that number, 26 victims were targeted because they worked for law enforcement or the government, or the perpetrator saw them as representing the government. Antigovernment victims made up the third most targeted group, behind racial/ethnic minorities and minorities targeted for a social status unrelated to race or ethnicity, such as sexuality or gender identity. While most victims of antiminority or racist violence are individuals of those social groups

themselves, antigovernment victims are typically representatives or proxies of the government the perpetrator hates (Sweeney & Perliger, 2018).

Amidst these ideological frameworks, oftentimes a fluid and confusing blend of belief systems that are cherry picked for words and phrases that justify violence, there will, on occasion, emerge an individual who endorses violence, intends to be violent, and mobilizes for violence. This is the signal within the noise that can be most difficult to detect by those tasked with threat assessment and threat management. Most individuals who endorse extremist beliefs will not be violent, even if they are sympathetic toward those who are violent.

Such need has prompted the development of a few risk assessment instruments, and among the several terrorist risk instruments available is the Terrorist Radicalization Assessment Protocol (TRAP-18; Meloy, 2017) developed by the second author. The TRAP-18 is composed of eighteen indicators: eight proximal warning behaviors and ten distal characteristics (Meloy, 2017). The theoretical model underlying the TRAP-18 is that the distal characteristics will precede the proximal warning behaviors in most cases, and help the assessor prioritize which cases warrant the most urgent response from a risk management perspective. Research has demonstrated support for this model through time sequence analysis (Meloy et al., 2021) and multidimensional scaling analysis (Goodwill & Meloy, 2019); and other research has supported the interrater reliability (Böckler et al., 2020; Meloy, Roshdi, et al., 2015), discriminant validity (Challacombe & Lucas, 2019; Meloy & Gill, 2016; Meloy et al., 2019), and predictive validity (Böckler et al., 2020; Challacombe & Lucas, 2019) of the TRAP-18 among terrorists, regardless of their ideology.

In addition to group studies, there have been a number of postattack case studies performed to test the ecological validity of the TRAP-18 (Böckler et al., 2016, 2017; Erlandsson & Reid Meloy, 2018; Meloy et al., 2015; Meloy & Genzman, 2016). However, such studies are retrospective, and do not provide any data on the ecological validity of the TRAP-18 *prior to* a possible attack wherein evidence was sufficient to justify, at least in the minds of law enforcement, an interdiction and prosecution. The case of *United States v. Christopher Paul Hasson* provided us an opportunity to do such a case study. In this particular case, federal law enforcement interdicted the perpetrator before he committed a

terrorist attack, and he was subsequently prosecuted by the U.S. Department of Justice for a series of offenses. He was convicted of four federal charges: unlawful possession of unregistered silencers, unlawful possession of firearm silencers unidentified by serial number, possession of firearms by an addict to and unlawful user of a controlled substance, and possession of a controlled substance (*United States of America v. Christopher Paul Hasson*, 2020d, p. 3). Mr. Hasson has been in federal custody since his arrest on February 15, 2019. Without rendering an academic opinion on the guilt or innocence of Mr. Hasson, we decided to conduct an analysis of the facts of the case through the lens of the TRAP-18 prior to any violence. Our purpose was to see the degree to which Mr. Hasson's behavior matched or did not match the findings among other terrorist attackers who have been studied retrospectively—both individually and in groups—and to judge whether the fact pattern in this case was sufficient to render an opinion of risk for a terrorist attack.

## Method

This case study examines the events in the years prior to Christopher Paul Hasson's arrest on February 15, 2019, which led law enforcement and prosecutors to believe he was planning a domestic terrorism attack. The data come from an extensive qualitative analysis of primary sources: the investigation and court files. The primary documents used include the Government's Memorandum in Aid of Sentencing prepared by the prosecution; the Defense Sentencing Memo; Exhibit 19: Report by the US Coast Guard Insider Threat Program which contains all of Mr. Hasson's online extremist activity; and the transcript of proceedings from his sentencing hearing.

As we coded the material, we focused predominantly on Mr. Hasson's internet research, his writings, and his communication with others in his social circle. Mr. Hasson's known activity until his arrest was analyzed through the lens of the Terrorist Radicalization Assessment Protocol-18 (TRAP-18; Meloy, 2017) to determine if his actions corresponded to the proximal warning behaviors and distal characteristics. An action(s) was judged to correspond with a TRAP-18 indicator if both authors were reasonably certain of its fit with the definition of the indicator as outlined in the TRAP-18 Manual (Meloy, 2017). The TRAP-18 indicators were used as a categorizing

system to sort and classify data points while reading through each primary document. Both coders, the authors of this study, consulted extensively with each other to determine whether an indicator was present or absent. Most of the activity discussed here takes place from 2017 to Mr. Hasson's arrest in 2019. All of the information in this case study can be found in the public domain. There was no need for IRB approval since this study was archival in nature, and there was no financial support provided to either authors for their completion of this study. Dr. Meloy does receive income for the licensing and distribution of the TRAP-18 from Multihealth Systems (mhs.com).

## Results

### Proximal Warning Behaviors

#### Pathway

Pathway warning behavior is research, planning, preparation, or implementation of an attack (Meloy, 2017). These are the later stage markers on the pathway to violence (Calhoun & Weston, 2003).

In June 2017, Mr. Hasson wrote in an email draft a short manifesto detailing his beliefs and ideas for an attack, stating that he is "dreaming of a way to kill almost every last person on the earth." He listed ideas such as a biological attack, an attack on the food supply, a bomber/sniper campaign, and enlisting the help of another country. He then stated that he plans to buy a van and land, come off tramadol (a synthetic opioid to which he was addicted), stockpile five locations with food and gear, learn basic chemistry, and learn about tactics used in the Ukrainian Civil War. Mr. Hasson wrote that he has to "take a serious look at appropriate individual targets, to bring greatest impact. Professors, DR's [*sic*], Politian's [*sic*], Judges, leftists in general" (United States of America v. Christopher Paul Hasson, 2020a, p. 9).

On June 7, 2017, Mr. Hasson emailed from his personal email address to his Coast Guard email address multiple documents, including "Home Workshop Explosives by Uncle Fester," "The Anarchist Cookbook Version 2000," "Emailing Anon—How to Make Semtex," and "The Terrorist's Handbook" (United States of America v. Christopher Paul Hasson, 2020c, p. 11).

In late 2017 and early 2018, Mr. Hasson took an interest in rifles, scopes, and optics, including reading extensive literature online on operating sniper rifles, emailing himself pictures of assault rifles, performing a Google search for a "sniper data book," and conducting extensive research on distance shooting (US v. Hasson, Gov Sentencing Memo, p. 13). On December 6, 2017, Mr. Hasson registered for an online sniper and sharpshooter forum, and in late December he purchased multiple rifle scopes and a sniper rifle (US v. Hasson, Gov Sentencing Memo, p. 12). In January and February 2018, Mr. Hasson continued conducting his research on sniper rifles, and logged multiple searches on the topics of subsonic (quiet) ammunition for a specific rifle, ways to paint a rifle with a camouflage pattern, and a ballistics calculator and other data collection (US v. Hasson, Gov Sentencing Memo, pp. 16–18).

In February 2018, Mr. Hasson performed the following searches: "where do senators live in dc," "do senators have ss protection," "are supreme court justices protected" (US v. Hasson, Exhibit 19, p. 52), "how do senators get around D.C." and "how do senators and congressmen get around D.C. private subway." He also attempted to find out where Justices Kagan and Sotomayor lived (Transcript of Proceedings, p. 233). Late that year in December, Mr. Hasson looked up "Joe Scarborough" (the host of a morning show on cable channel Microsoft/National Broadcasting Company; MSNBC) after seeing news about Scarborough disparaging the President. Mr. Hasson then searched "where is morning joe filmed" and soon found an article about Scarborough's former home, put the address into Google Maps, and scrolled in and out on the location for about 30 s (US v. Hasson, Gov Sentencing Memo, pp. 19–20). On January 17, 2019, drawing from Anders Breivik's manifesto and definition of "Category A" traitors, Mr. Hasson created a spreadsheet listing Democratic leaders and media personalities, including but not limited to: "JOEY" (most likely Joe Scarborough), "Chris hayes," "Sen blumen jew" (presumably Senator Richard Blumenthal), "pelosi," "sen kaine," "shumer" (presumably Senator Chuck Schumer), "don lemon," "poca warren" (presumably Senator Elizabeth Warren), "cortez" (presumably Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez), "harris" (presumably then-Senator Kamala Harris), "beto ourourke," "iihan omar [*sic*]," and more. On the same day, Mr. Hasson

searched “what if trump illegally impeached,” “best place in dc to see congress people,” “where in dc to [sic] congress live,” and “civil war if trump impeached” (US v. Hasson, Gov Sentencing Memo, pp. 21–22).

Lastly, on January 3, 2019, Mr. Hasson searched for “steroids” within the Breivik manifesto and read a section where Breivik recommended taking steroids in the weeks prior to an attack in order to enhance stamina (US v. Hasson, Gov Sentencing Memo, p. 23). In February 2019, when agents searched Mr. Hasson’s home, they found over 30 bottles labeled HGH, five vials of testosterone, and mestanolone (a steroid) in pill and powder form. However, Mr. Hasson had been taking testosterone or other steroids for years, starting as early as 2016 when he purchased testosterone online (US v. Hasson, Gov Sentencing Memo, p. 24).

In late January 2019, Mr. Hasson focused on a section of the Breivik manifesto regarding the Knights Templar and a ritual to transform into a “Justiciar Knight.” Mr. Hasson proceeded to read about what a Justiciar Knight must do before “taking up armed struggle,” spending time on sections that discussed how best to execute an attack, avoid suspicion from relatives and friends, avoid ending up on watch lists, and equipment needed (US v. Hasson, Exhibit 19, pp. 101–105).

### **Fixation**

Fixation warning behavior indicates an increasingly pathological preoccupation with a person or a cause, accompanied by a deterioration in social and/or occupational life (Meloy, 2017).

While Mr. Hasson likely was a “skinhead” and white supremacist since youth (US v. Hasson, Gov Sentencing Memo, pp. 5–6), his fixation on white supremacy and other attackers became clear in 2017. On March 16, 2017, he read and emailed himself the manifesto of Anders Breivik (US v. Hasson, Gov Sentencing Memo, p. 10), a right-wing extremist who committed the July 2011 Norway attacks. In the subsequent years, Mr. Hasson performed countless Google searches regarding white supremacy, with queries such as “white homeland,” “when are whites going to wake up,” “please god let there be a race war,” “best n\*\*\*\*\* killing gun” (US v. Hasson, Gov Sentencing Memo, p. 7), “how can white people rise against the jews,” and “how to rid the us [sic] of jews” (US v. Hasson, Gov Sentencing Memo,

p. 19), all made from his work computer at the United States Coast Guard (US v. Hasson, Gov Sentencing Memo, p. 19). He spent dozens if not hundreds of on-duty hours using his work computer to conduct searches and read content revolving around his beliefs, spending at least some time almost every day. Mr. Hasson also frequently used his U.S. Coast Guard email address to send himself white supremacist and right-wing terrorism-related content, including an email containing a letter he wrote to Harold Covington, a neo-Nazi leader, in September 2017 (US v. Hasson, Gov Sentencing Memo, p. 3).

At this time, Mr. Hasson had recently moved away from his home and wife in North Carolina, and was living alone in Maryland, working a desk job at the Coast Guard Headquarters in Washington, D.C. (United States of America v. Christopher Paul Hasson, 2020b, p. 10). He had few friends and connections (US v. Hasson, Defense Sentencing Memo, p. 11), and it is likely that his tramadol addiction—a synthetic opiate pain reliever—and fixation on white supremacy, neo-Nazism, and terrorists precluded him from developing a healthy social life in his new job and place of living. Although his work did not reportedly deteriorate or decline in quality, he spent hours during the workday using official Coast Guard accounts to perform his personal research.

### **Identification**

Identification warning behavior indicates a psychological desire to be a pseudo-commando, have a warrior mentality, closely associate with weapons or other military or law enforcement paraphernalia, identify with previous attackers or assassins, or identify oneself as an agent to advance a particular cause or belief system (Meloy, 2017).

In September 2017, in his letter to Harold Covington that he emailed to himself, Mr. Hasson stated: “I am a long time White Nationalist, having been a skinhead 30 plus years ago before my time in the military.” In the same letter, he wrote that he supports the idea of a white homeland, wants to help “red pill” others, and believes in “a little focused violence” to advance the cause (US v. Hasson, Exhibit 19, pp. 22–23). In another email to an unknown person, he discussed meeting people interested in Ásatrú, a religion whose symbols and other aspects have been co-opted by white nationalists, and used “14 words” (a well-known white supremacist statement: “We must



secure the existence of our people and a future for white children”) as his signature (US v. Hasson, Gov Sentencing Memo, p. 5). Mr. Hasson also performed countless Google searches and read copious online literature discussing white supremacy and neo-Nazism. Lastly, when agents searched his home after his arrest, they found multiple Confederate flags hanging in his home (US v. Hasson, Gov Sentencing Memo, p. 7).

For over a decade, Mr. Hasson stockpiled weapons, spending thousands of dollars on guns, ammunition, silencers, and other paraphernalia (US v. Hasson, Gov Sentencing Memo, p. 11). He lied on three occasions in 2017 on federal ATF forms to acquire weapons at gun shows, claiming that he lived in Virginia rather than Maryland (US v. Hasson, Gov Sentencing Memo, p. 32). Mr. Hasson further purchased parts to assemble illegal silencers in 2017 (US v. Hasson, Gov Sentencing Memo, p. 39). Due to his tramadol addiction, he could not legally own firearms at this time; however after his arrest, 15 guns were recovered from his home (US v. Hasson, Gov Sentencing Memo, p. 38). Mr. Hasson’s identification with weapons is also documented in his many searches and online activity surrounding sniper rifles and their usage (US v. Hasson, Gov Sentencing Memo, p. 19).

At the same time as his growing interest in white supremacy, Mr. Hasson also found an interest in right-wing terrorists, often reading the Breivik manifesto, as well as the manifestos of Unabomber Ted Kaczynski and Eric Rudolph—two lone actor terrorists who engaged in serial bomb attacks during the late twentieth century (see for example, US v. Hasson, Exhibit 19, p. 7). Mr. Hasson also read the Elliot Rodger manifesto and that of the Virginia tech shooter (Transcript of Proceedings, pp. 120–121). He frequently reread sections of all the manifestos and even took their advice, for example, acquiring steroids and HGH like Breivik recommended (US v. Hasson, Gov Sentencing Memo, p. 23). In a March 2018 text conversation with a family member, Mr. Hasson lauded Eric Rudolph for his attack compared to a recent shooter they were discussing, saying that Rudolph “was smart” to bring supplies and that “his book has a lot of good pointers” (US v. Hasson, Gov Sentencing Memo, p. 26).

Mr. Hasson’s interest in right-wing terrorism was also visible in his many queries about terrorist and nationalist organizations in other

countries. In late 2017, he researched the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, performing searches such as “how to support hamas,” “how to support syrian government,” and “how to travel to Syria to support syrian government” (US v. Hasson, Exhibit 19, p. 34). He also searched for “current islamic terrorist groups,” “iranian embassy dc,” and “hezbollah” (US v. Hasson, Exhibit 19, p. 32). Furthermore, he researched the IRA and living in Ireland with searches such as “gun ownership in ireland,” “cost of living in rural ireland,” and “cheap flights ireland” (US v. Hasson, Exhibit 19, p. 35). His desire to support these countries’ terrorist organizations, to the point of traveling or moving to these countries, demonstrates his intense desire to partake in some kind of fighting and military action as a soldier for the cause.

### *Novel Aggression*

Novel aggression warning behavior is an act of violence that seems unrelated to any targeted violence pathway and is committed for the first time (Meloy, 2017). It is typically done to test one’s ability to actually be violent.

There is no evidence of novel aggression in Mr. Hasson’s case.

### *Energy Burst*

Energy burst warning behavior is 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 weeks, days, or hours before the attack (Meloy, 2017).

In January and February 2019, Mr. Hasson’s Google searches and other online activity increased in frequency and duration (US v. Hasson, Exhibit 19, pp. 84–120). In January, he searched for and read a section in the Breivik manifesto that discussed taking testosterone, potential “‘aggressiveness’ pills,” and/or steroids for “select military operations,” all of which “would turn you into a superhuman one-man-army for 2 hours!” (US v. Hasson, Gov Sentencing Memo, pp. 23). When Mr. Hasson was arrested in mid-February, agents found both human growth hormone and steroids in his possession (US v. Hasson, Gov Sentencing Memo, pp. 23–24). Also in January 2019, Mr. Hasson created his

spreadsheet list of targets, discussed further in the “Pathway” section above.

While there is not an overwhelming amount of data to support the coding of “Energy Burst” as an indicator, Mr. Hasson’s actions as described above adhere to the definition of this proximal warning behavior, which is why the authors chose to code it as present. However, more confirming data and further investigation would be needed for absolute certainty of the presence of “Energy Burst” in Mr. Hasson’s pre-arrest behavior.

### ***Leakage***

Leakage warning behavior is the communication to a third party of an intent to do harm to a target through an attack (Meloy, 2017).

In an August 2017 conversation with a coworker, Mr. Hasson referenced the recent vehicle attack in Charlottesville, VA by a neo-Nazi, saying “I feel like that guy at the rally, I would love to just run over people up here” (US v. Hasson, Exhibit 19, p. 17). Also, in September 2018, in a text message to a relative, he said he wanted to join them in fighting overseas with other white nationalists. The relative mentioned that he met an American who had fought in Ukraine and is a part of a group that “go to foreign countries to assist nationalists in war.” Mr. Hasson and his relative then discussed the different countries this person had mentioned and the logistics of this organization, and Mr. Hasson’s responses showed he was interested in the possibility and wanted to talk to this new person as well (US v. Hasson, Gov Sentencing Memo, pp. 28–30).

### ***Last Resort***

Last resort warning behavior is evidence of a “violent action imperative” and/or “time imperative;” it is often a signal of desperation or distress (Meloy, 2017; Mohandie & Duffy, 1999). It is often the result of a triggering event, or one that is anticipated, that involves a loss in love or work.

On February 11, 2019, Mr. Hasson messaged a coworker to ask about job openings in other areas: “I am done time for me to check out looking for something in the next 6 months” (US v. Hasson, Exhibit 19, p. 117). It is not clear exactly why Mr. Hasson was looking for a new job or not interested in living in the D.C. area anymore. He had

been at the Coast Guard headquarters since 2016 and had reconciled with his wife in 2017 (US v. Hasson, Defense Sentencing Memo, p. 11). His comment “I am done” and statement that he is looking for something new in the next 6 months are not clearly indicative of anything in particular, but in the context of his increased Google searches, reading of Breivik’s manifesto, and acquisition of HGH, his statements could indicate a desire to leave his job because he doesn’t want them finding out about his beliefs or desire to commit an attack. Either way, it is unclear exactly what Mr. Hasson may have meant, whether he actually tried to find a new job, or whether that correlates with his other actions of preparing for an attack. Because this indicator appears to be quite ambiguous, we chose not to code it.

### ***Directly Communicated Threat***

Directly communicated threat warning behavior is the communication of a direct threat to the target or law enforcement beforehand (Meloy, 2017).

There is no evidence of a directly communicated threat in Mr. Hasson’s case.

### ***Distal Characteristics***

#### ***Personal Grievance and Moral Outrage***

Personal grievance and moral outrage joins both personal life experience and particular historical, religious, or political events. The personal grievance is often defined by a major loss in love or work, feelings of anger and humiliation, and the blaming of others. Moral outrage is typically a vicarious identification with a group which has suffered (Meloy, 2017), even though the lone-actor terrorist has usually not experienced the same suffering, if any at all.

Mr. Hasson demonstrated his anger toward a decision his daughter made to marry a Black man in a series of text messages to another relative in July 2018. He wrote: “I dont [*sic*] give a fuck about what [redacted] does, shes [*sic*] married and guarentee [*sic*] pregnant,” “Her “husband” is going overseas and she will get bored and cheat on him just for drama,” “Waste of a human,” and “She is typical western woman you were right all along” (US v. Hasson, Gov Sentencing Memo, p. 27). Mr. Hasson’s use of quotes around the word “husband” points to his feelings that this union is illegitimate or not real in some way.

Mr. Hasson calling his daughter a “typical western woman” in a derogatory fashion draws on his many other tirades against “western” culture that he considers too Marxist, socialist, and not in line with his conservative, white supremacist beliefs. In his 2017 manifesto, Mr. Hasson had previously written, “I have not properly raised my daughter I will have to reach out to her to see if I can reverse some of the damage done to her” (US v. Hasson, Exhibit 19, p. 8). Mr. Hasson’s defense team argued that Mr. Hasson “went through a rocky period with his daughter, Maura, after she posted pictures of her wedding on Facebook without telling the family she was getting married” (US v. Hasson, Defense Sentencing Memo, p. 11). It is not clear whether Mr. Hasson’s anger was directed at his daughter’s decision to marry without telling the family or at the race of her husband, but his daughter married around 2016 (Transcript of Proceedings, pp. 75–76), and he made the comments about her being a “waste of a human” and not caring what she does in July of 2018.

Mr. Hasson’s moral outrage at liberal democratic society is more apparent in his many Google searches and his own writing on this topic. In his manifesto from 2017, he wrote, “Liberalist/globalist ideology is destroying traditional peoples esp white” and “I don’t know if there truly is a “conspiracy” of (((People))) out to destroy me and mine, but there is an attack none the less [*sic*]” (US v. Hasson, Exhibit 19, pp. 8–9). Triple parentheses, also known as triple brackets or (((echo))), is an anti-Semitic symbol used to identify Jews (Echo., n.d.), although here Mr. Hasson uses 4. In his later attempted communication with neo-Nazi Harold Covington, Mr. Hasson wrote, “the government has expertly infiltrated and destroyed from within most if not all Pro White organizations . . . We need a white homeland as Europe seems lost. How long we can hold out there and prevent the n\*\*\*\*\*ization of the Northwest until whites wake up on their own or are forcibly made to make a decision whether to roll over and die or to stand up remains to be seen.” In the same document, he then says that young people, “need a Homeland to fight for as America has turned its back on them” (US v. Hasson, Exhibit 19, p. 23).

### ***Framed by an Ideology***

Framed by an ideology is the presence of a belief system which justifies the terrorist’s intent

to act (Meloy, 2017). It can be a religious belief system, a political philosophy, a secular commitment, a one-issue conflict, or an idiosyncratic justification.

Christopher Hasson’s nascent ideology seems to have originated early in his life. In his unsent letter to neo-Nazi Harold Covington, Mr. Hasson stated, “I am a long time White Nationalist, having been a skinhead 30 plus years ago before my time in the military” (US v. Hasson, Exhibit 19, p. 22). An incident in 1995 further confirms Mr. Hasson’s long history of white supremacist belief—on February 11, 1995, Mr. Hasson watched while his friend, a man wearing swastika patches on his jacket, attempted to shoot and then proceeded to beat a man with his gun. The victim later identified both Mr. Hasson and the friend as “skinheads” (US v. Hasson, Gov Sentencing Memo, pp. 5–6). Mr. Hasson had a long history of white nationalist belief and even went so far as to get a swastika tattoo as a young adult (Transcript of Proceedings, p. 59).

From 2017 onwards, Mr. Hasson’s online activity further details his thought processes and belief system. His many searches on the topics of race and racism include 2017 searches such as “white homeland,” “please god let there be a race war,” “how to rid the us of jews,” and his 2018 search for “best n\*\*\*\*\* killing gun” (US v. Hasson, Gov Sentencing Memo, p. 7, 19). In 2017, Mr. Hasson also browsed a lot of pro-Russian and neo-Fascist content on the internet (US v. Hasson, Exhibit 19, p. 13), and on multiple occasions searched for terms related to Russian immigration (US v. Hasson, Exhibit 19, p. 18). In September 2017, Mr. Hasson proceeded to first perform many searches for “Covington” and then accessed many of Covington’s ebooks as well as ebooks by other neo-Nazis (US v. Hasson, Exhibit 19, p. 18). Throughout the month, he continued researching Harold Covington and “northwest migration,” searched on Amazon for books on “white power,” researched right-wing terrorism and FEAR (a terrorist group) on Wikipedia, and performed a search for “different racial characteristics of humans” (US v. Hasson, Exhibit 19, pp. 19–21). Toward the end of the month, he searched in Reddit for “Christian identity” and looked through many sites about Christian identity and white supremacist extremist content (US v. Hasson, Exhibit 19, p. 21). In October 2017, Mr. Hasson performed internet searches for the terms “cross dressers [*sic*] in coast guard” and “transgender in



coast guard 2016” (US v. Hasson, Exhibit 19, p. 24). Throughout the last few months of 2017, Mr. Hasson continued conducting hundreds of searches and accessing hundreds of websites on the topic of Christian Identity extremism and white nationalism (US v. Hasson, Exhibit 19, pp. 18–28). In November, he spent extensive time researching Nazi Germany on Wikipedia (US v. Hasson, Exhibit 19, p. 28) and the following January, conducted even more searches about Hitler, the SS, and Nazi Germany (US v. Hasson, Exhibit 19, p. 38).

Mr. Hasson’s own writings offer a look into his ideology as well. In his manifesto, his main complaint was that, “liberalist/globalist ideology is destroying traditional peoples esp white.” He wrote that he is “looking to Russia with hopeful eyes or any land that despises the west’s liberalism. Excluding of course the muslim scum. Who rightfully despise the west’s liberal degeneracy” (US v. Hasson, Exhibit 19, p. 8). In his 2017 letter to Harold Covington, Mr. Hasson wrote about being a long-time Skinhead and White Nationalist, and advocated for “a little focused violence” to establish a white homeland to prevent the “n\*\*\*\*\*ization of the Northwest.” Mr. Hasson explained his dreams of creating a “white community” in this homeland and taking an active part in it (US v. Hasson, Exhibit 19, pp. 22–23).

However, Mr. Hasson’s ideology did not stop at racism and white supremacy. Throughout the two-year time period before his arrest, he visited the Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW) subreddit platform tens of thousands of times and constantly viewed “gender-based extremist content” that promoted misogynistic and discriminatory views towards women (US v. Hasson, Exhibit 19, p. 2). In July 2016, Mr. Hasson created a Word document that he last edited in June 2018, which contained two pages detailing his negative views toward femininity: “Femininity is always feigned,” “Most women are losers who don’t have anything to offer but their skills at social manipulation and a brief 15-year period of sexual attractiveness” (US v. Hasson, Exhibit 19, pp. 2–3). On June 5, 2018, Mr. Hasson created another Word document to which he added Bible verses that express negativity toward women (US v. Hasson, Exhibit 19, p. 57). Although some of the verses discuss having a bad wife, many of Mr. Hasson’s chosen verses focus on promiscuous women or prostitutes. On February 14, 2019, the day before his

arrest, Mr. Hasson opened and read both documents (US v. Hasson, Exhibit 19, pp. 118–120).

### ***Failure to Affiliate With an Extremist or Other Group***

Failure to affiliate with an extremist or other group is defined as rejection of or by an actual extremist or other group (Meloy, 2017).

In September 2017, Mr. Hasson wrote an email to an unknown receiver, inquiring about Ásatrú. Also known as heathenry, Ásatrú is a recently revived religion from Iceland in which adherents worship ancient Nordic gods and goddesses. However, some of its symbols have been co-opted by white supremacists and were featured on their banners at the 2017 “Unite the Right” march in Charlottesville (Samuel, 2017). Mr. Hasson wrote, “I am interested in Asatru and meeting with like minded individuals. I am stationed in DC Metro area. Do you have kindred within 200 miles or so? Probably the farthest I could drive regularly. I have some basic understanding in the religion. Thanks. 14 words” (US v. Hasson, Gov Sentencing Memo, p. 5). It is unknown whether he received a response, but since there is no evidence of Mr. Hasson ever meeting with this group or further researching Ásatrú, it is likely he did not hear back.

It is challenging to determine whether this indicator is present or not since Mr. Hasson seemed to have not received a definitive rejection from this group. However, since there were no more records of Ásatrú in Mr. Hasson’s emails or other documents, the lack of response from the receiver of the email could be seen as itself a rejection of Mr. Hasson, or at least it likely seemed that way to him. Further investigation would be warranted to confirm the lack of response and the way Mr. Hasson perceived it. Still, Mr. Hasson attempting to get involved with Ásatrú and receiving no answer fits the definition of failing to affiliate with an extremist group.

### ***Dependence on the Virtual Community***

Dependence on the virtual community is evidence of the individual’s active communication with or learning from others through social media or the internet concerning terrorist activities or beliefs (Meloy, 2017).

Starting around January 2017 and until his arrest in February 2019, Mr. Hasson spent hours every day performing Google and Bing searches and reading extremist material. His main topics of interest included the alt-right, mass shootings, Russia, weapons, right-wing terrorists, and white supremacy. His frequent searches regarding his ideology are discussed in further detail above. Mr. Hasson also extensively used the internet to research and consume content written by right-wing terrorists. His searches on these individuals and his readings and rereadings of their manifestos are further discussed in “Identification” above. Mr. Hasson even sent the manifestos of Anders Breivik, Ted Kaczynski, and Eric Rudolph to his official Coast Guard email address in 2017. In addition to researching content related to his ideology, Mr. Hasson also frequently searched for weapons-related material, including looking up “home workshop explosives handbook,” *The Terrorist’s Handbook*, and extensive information on rifles and other guns, discussed in more detail in the “Pathway” section above.

Lastly, Mr. Hasson also communicated via text message with a relative, where he expressed admiration for Eric Rudolph and discussed joining white nationalists in overseas fighting in separate conversations.

Most, if not all, of Mr. Hasson’s learning about and consumption of extremist content occurred online and can be found in Exhibit 19 (US v. Hasson, Exhibit 19).

### *Thwarting of Occupational Goals*

Thwarting of occupational goals is a major setback or failure in a planned occupational life course (Meloy, 2017).

In 2016, Mr. Hasson was promoted to Lieutenant within the U.S. Coast Guard and transferred to their headquarters in Washington, D.C. from his home in North Carolina. While he did receive a promotion, the responsibilities of his new position did not suit him, and he “felt out-of-place and uncomfortable in an office environment” (US v. Hasson, Defense Sentencing Memo, p. 10). Mr. Hasson’s new job was “solitary and isolated,” “a bad fit” (Transcript of Proceedings p. 253). His work was clearly boring and likely unfulfilling, as Mr. Hasson managed to spend hours a day conducting his personal research and writing on the clock, using his

work computer (US v. Hasson, Exhibit 19). Around the same time, his dependence on tramadol intensified and “Mr. Hasson was concerned that it would cost him his job” (Transcript of Proceedings p. 254). Lastly, due to his age, Mr. Hasson was nearing his mandatory retirement from the Coast Guard, and he himself said that “staring down a mandatory retirement . . . caused many problems in [his] life and relationships, which led [him] to wrongfully abuse drugs to help deal with the anxiety and uncertainty” (Transcript of Proceedings p. 266).

Although Mr. Hasson generally received positive job evaluations and seemed to be successful in his career, he was unhappy at his new desk job, fearful of his future without the Coast Guard, and anxious about his superiors finding out about his tramadol dependence. It is important to view “Thwarting of occupation goals” through a subjective lens to assess whether Mr. Hasson himself felt that he was experiencing a failure or setback in his career path, rather than examine what his work life may have looked like from the outside. Since he was not fulfilling his personal occupational goals, largely anxious and unhappy in his career, and this unhappiness led to further problems in his personal life, we decided to code this distal characteristic.

### *Changes in Thinking and Emotion*

Changes in thinking and emotion is indicated when thoughts and their expression become more strident, simplistic, and absolute. Argument ceases and preaching begins. Persuasion yields to imposition of one’s beliefs on others. There is no critical analysis of theory or opinion, and the mantra “Don’t think, just believe” is adopted. Emotions typically move from only anger and argument, to also include contempt and disdain for others’ beliefs, disgust for the outgroup, and a willingness to homicidally aggress against them (Meloy, 2017). Violence is cloaked in self-righteousness and the pretense of superior belief. Humor is lost.

A few months before his arrest, Mr. Hasson sent the following text messages in succession to a family member: “Yeah I give up on this country being saved,” “its [*sic*] ideological social financial morally bankrupt,” “there is nothing worth saving at the federal level” (US v. Hasson, Gov Sentencing Memo, p. 31). These thoughts are

very different from his previous views which included a strong admiration and support for then-president Donald Trump and the federal government, as well as a generally positive regard for the United States, a country whose government was his employer.

### ***Failure of Sexual-Intimate Pair Bonding***

Failure of sexual-intimate pair bonding is coded if the subject has historically failed to form a lasting sexually intimate relationship (Meloy, 2017).

There is no evidence of failure of sexual-intimate pair bonding in Mr. Hasson's case. At the time of his arrest, he had been married for over 20 years with two adult children (US v. Hasson, Defense Sentencing Memo, p. 9). Although Mr. Hasson faced some problems in his marriage around the time of his promotion in 2016, he and his wife reconciled in 2017 (US v. Hasson, Defense Sentencing Memo, p. 11).

### ***Mental Disorder***

Mental disorder is coded if there was evidence of a major mental disorder by history or at present (Meloy, 2017).

For years leading up to his arrest, Mr. Hasson suffered from Opioid Use Disorder, battling an addiction to tramadol. He first started taking the prescription pain medication after it had been prescribed to his wife for back pain, but eventually he began taking tramadol to "cope with feelings of depression" (US v. Hasson, Defense Sentencing Memo, p. 14). Over time, Mr. Hasson's abuse of tramadol escalated and he started ordering pills online, taking great care to disguise his purchases. He often took the tramadol at work and even purchased synthetic urine on multiple occasions in order to pass the U.S. Coast Guard's drug tests (US v. Hasson, Gov Sentencing Memo, pp. 33–34). By the time of his arrest, Mr. Hasson was consuming many times the approved daily dosage of tramadol (US v. Hasson, Defense Sentencing Memo, p. 14), which has the potential to cause intense mood disturbance including hallucinations and manic behavior (US v. Hasson, Defense Sentencing Memo, p. 16).

In addition to his tramadol abuse, Mr. Hasson also used steroids "to increase muscle mass" and to "stop loss of muscle mass associated with aging" (Transcript of Proceedings, p. 64). He purchased it from multiple distributors in 2016

and emailed one, saying "you will be seeing more from me." Mr. Hasson then purchased more steroids in early 2017 (US v. Hasson, Gov Sentencing Memo, p. 25). During his arrest in 2019, agents found five vials of testosterone and another steroid in Mr. Hasson's home, as well as over thirty bottles of human growth hormone (US v. Hasson, Gov Sentencing Memo, p. 24).

While Mr. Hasson was never professionally diagnosed, he likely suffered from some depression and anxiety throughout his life. The Defense's expert witness—behavioral pharmacologist Dr. Kelly Dunn—mentioned that Opioid Use Disorder is highly correlated with depression, and said that Mr. Hasson's OUD "was likely related, at least in part, to preexisting underlying depression" (US v. Hasson, Defense Sentencing Memo, p. 16). Dr. Stephen Hart, the defense's risk assessment expert witness, stated that his findings indicated symptoms of anxiety and depression in Mr. Hasson, although they were not enough to warrant a diagnosis (Transcript of Proceedings, p. 37).

### ***Greater Creativity and Innovation***

Greater creativity and innovation is defined as an act of planned terrorism which is innovative or likely to be imitated by others (Meloy, 2017). The planned terrorist act is creative (a major aspect has not been done before in contemporary times) and/or innovative (imitated by others).

There is no evidence of greater creativity and innovation in Mr. Hasson's case. In fact, he heavily drew from and followed the instructions of the Breivik manifesto and the manifestos of other right-wing terrorists (US v. Hasson, Gov Sentencing Memo, p. 20).

### ***History of Criminal Violence***

History of criminal violence is coded if there is evidence of instrumental criminal violence by history (Meloy, 2017). Virtually all acts of terrorism are predatory (instrumental) violence. This characteristic indicates a capacity and a willingness to engage in predation for a variety of reasons, such as a history of armed robberies or planned assaults on others.

Mr. Hasson had no history of criminal violence.

For a summary of the proximal warning behaviors and distal characteristics coded in the Hasson case, see Table 1.

**Table 1**  
*TRAP-18 Indicators in the Case of Christopher Hasson*

Proximal warning behaviors	Coding	Distal characteristics	Coding
Pathway	X	Personal grievance and moral outrage	X
Fixation	X	Framed by an Ideology	X
Identification	X	Failure to affiliate with an extremist or other group	X
Novel Aggression		Dependence on the virtual community	X
Energy Burst	X	Thwarting of occupational goals	X
Leakage	X	Changes in thinking and emotion	X
Last Resort		Failure of sexual-intimate pair bonding	
Directly Communicated Threat		Mental disorder	X
		Greater creativity and innovation	
		History of criminal violence	

## Discussion

The goal of threat assessment and management is to prevent targeted attacks. While postattack research using various threat assessment tools and checklists is useful to assess the validity of risk instruments, the end goal is always to be able to use these tools to assess individuals who have not yet committed an attack, determine if they are at risk, and apply effective intervention strategies to reduce the likelihood of such an event (Meloy & Hoffmann, 2021). The case study of Christopher Paul Hasson, a man arrested, prosecuted, and convicted of crimes prior to a possible attack, serves to test the ecological validity of the TRAP-18 as a preventive instrument by posing the following four questions: (a) How similar or different are the TRAP-18 indicators—both individually and *in toto*—in the Hasson case when compared to other subjects who went on to complete a lone actor terrorist attack? (b) Does the fact pattern in the case provide a sufficient basis upon which a judgment of risk could be made? (c) What is the reader's judgment of risk of an attack? And (d) Does the reader's judgment of risk justify the arrest, prosecution, and conviction of Mr. Hasson for related crimes to prevent a purported act of targeted violence?

Prior to his arrest, Mr. Hasson's activity indicated that he coded for 5 of 8 (62.5%) proximal warning behaviors on the TRAP-18: pathway, fixation, identification, energy burst, and leakage. These warning behaviors are typically more frequent—to a significant degree—in most individuals who go on to commit a successful attack, and less frequent in those who do not (Böckler et al., 2020; Challacombe & Lucas, 2019; Meloy &

Gill, 2016; Meloy et al., 2019). The four separate data sets from these cited studies total 305 subjects in Europe and North America between 1990 and 2017 who committed an act of terrorist violence, or were initially considered at risk of committing such an act. In the Challacombe and Lucas (2019) study of Sovereign Citizens, pathway, identification, leakage, and last resort were the strongest correlates of violence among the proximal warning behaviors, with moderate to large effect sizes when compared to nonviolent Sovereign Citizens. In the Böckler et al. (2020) study of German jihadists, pathway, last resort, energy burst, and novel aggression significantly differentiated nonviolent from violent extremists, and their overall models produced AUCs between 0.83 and 0.90 for correct classification. Novel aggression generally appears in less than half of lone actor terrorist cases, while directly communicated threats occur in <20% of terrorism cases (Meloy & Gill, 2016). Both were absent in the Hasson case. Novel aggression—the need to test one's ability or capacity to be violent—was likely diluted by his occupational history of 30 years in the U.S. military and his ownership and use of firearms in practice over his entire adult life. In one study, both novel aggression and directly communicated threat were *more* frequent in individuals who nonetheless were subjects of national concern, but did not go on to attack (Meloy et al., 2019).

There were no known actions that clearly indicated the presence of last resort warning behavior, which is usually retrospectively found in successful attackers (Meloy et al., 2019). Although Mr. Hasson messaged a coworker about job openings and indicated a desire to leave

his current position in the days leading up to his arrest, we chose not to code for last resort since this action is fairly ambiguous and does not in itself indicate the warning behavior. However, the sentiment that he expressed in being interested in leaving his job and moving on is similar to that which in combination with other actions, can be considered last resort (Böckler et al., 2017; Meloy & Genzman, 2016). Since a last resort action is usually present in the hours or days leading up to an attack, and because Mr. Hasson was arrested before he could commit an attack, it is hard to know if there could or would have been a clearer last resort warning behavior had he decided to perpetrate his attack. Typically this warning behavior is coded with the presence of either words or actions: a statement that implies a violent time/action imperative, or behaviors that indicate a foreshortened future (Meloy, 2017). In a time sequence analysis of the TRAP-18 indicators in 125 lone actor terrorists, last resort was temporally closer to an attack than several other warning behaviors, such as fixation and identification, but fell below the proximity coefficient threshold we established for the study in its temporal relationship to the attack (Meloy et al., 2021). The sheer amount of data and behaviors that translate into Mr. Hasson's displays of pathway, fixation, identification, energy burst, and leakage add to the seriousness of the situation and suggest the potential of an attack, but the presence of such data does not absolutely predict an attack. However, Böckler et al. (2020) found a sensitivity and specificity of .80 and .93, respectively, for a weighted proximal warning behavior predictive model composed of pathway, energy burst, novel aggression, and last resort.

In addition to his five proximal warning behaviors, Mr. Hasson also coded for 7 of 10 distal characteristics (70%) on the TRAP-18: personal grievance and moral outrage, framed by an ideology, failure to affiliate with an extremist or other group, dependence on the virtual community, thwarting of occupational goals, changes in thinking and emotion, and mental disorder. While Hasson, like almost all lone actor terrorists, presents personal grievance and moral outrage as well as strong ideological beliefs, his failure to affiliate with an extremist or other group is less common in examples of successful attackers (Meloy, Roshdi, et al., 2015; Meloy & Gill, 2016; Meloy et al., 2019). This could be partially due to the advent of social media; now,

fewer attackers feel a need or desire to affiliate with an actual group on the ground when they can be informed and inspired online, especially from the writings of previous attackers. While this distal characteristic can also be seen as fairly ambiguous in Mr. Hasson's case, he clearly attempted to learn more about and connect in person with people who adhere to the Ásatrú religious group, and was unable to form any meaningful contact.

Mr. Hasson also displayed a strong dependence on the virtual community, exemplified by his thousands of Google searches on extremist and terrorist topics, and his frequent reading of lone actor terrorists' manifestos, including Elliot Rodger, Anders Breivik, Eric Rudolph, and Ted Kaczynski. This distal characteristic commonly appears in both successful attackers and those who were thwarted in an attack plan (Meloy & Gill, 2016), as well as between attackers and subjects of national security concern who did not go on to attack (Meloy et al., 2019). Mr. Hasson's dependence on the virtual world for his information and plans was one of the strongest indicators in this case, not only as a distal characteristic but as a gateway for the emergence of other TRAP-18 indicators. His online activity was extensive and extremist, and appears to have led both law enforcement and federal prosecutors to believe he was actively planning an attack.

Another common distal characteristic is changes in thinking and emotion, which is almost always present in successful attackers. In the Hasson case, we do not see an overwhelming amount of organized change in thinking and emotion due to his ideology being from the beginning quite confusing and fluid, what is often referred to now as "salad bar, cafeteria, or copy-paste" ideology. However, there is a turning point close to Mr. Hasson's arrest where he voices that he is giving up on the country and is unhappy with the federal government. Like most attackers, his thoughts become more binary, simplistic, and absolute without any critical thinking, and he embraces the idea that everything is lost and there is no point in continuing; however, the object of his not continuing is unclear. This is in stark contrast to his previous thoughts of loving the US and wanting to make it a better place by creating a white homeland. Changes in thinking and emotion was found to be a "turning point event" indicator in a large study of 125 terrorists



whose behaviors were subjected to time sequence analysis (Meloy et al., 2021).

Mr. Hasson also coded for two very common distal characteristics, mental disorder and thwarting of occupational goals. His opioid use disorder places him in a similar position to many successful attackers, who frequently suffer from substance abuse as well as other mental disorders such as depression or anxiety (Gill et al., 2021). While his career goals were not directly thwarted, Mr. Hasson's unhappiness at his job and anxiety about retirement or his superiors finding out about his tramadol addiction signaled a struggle in his occupational life and created further distress in his personal life. The majority of studied successful attackers face some degree of thwarted occupational goals (Böckler et al., 2016, 2020; Erlandsson & Reid Meloy, 2018; Meloy, Roshdi, et al., 2015; Meloy & Genzman, 2016; Meloy & Gill, 2016; Meloy et al., 2019).

Lone actor terrorists also typically struggle to find romantic or sexual partners, and generally fail at sexual-pair bonding. Mr. Hasson, however, at the time of his arrest was married for over 20 years with two children. He and his wife went through a period of marital difficulty around 2016, but reconnected in 2017, around the time when his extremist activity became more severe. During the few years leading up to his arrest, Mr. Hasson consumed extensive sexist and misogynistic content, and even wrote some of his own misogynistic views down, but he did not seem to have any significant problems with his wife. The absence of this indicator distinguishes him from the vast majority of lone actor terrorists (Meloy & Gill, 2016; Meloy et al., 2019).

Mr. Hasson also did not display greater creativity and innovation in his plans or ideas for an attack. He relied heavily on ideas from other lone terrorists' writings and did not showcase any creativity. This indicator is problematic because definitive evidence typically does not exist until after an attack has been committed. It is left to researchers in preattack studies to infer from the planning whether or not an attack would have been unique and subsequently imitated by others, or had not been similarly done in contemporary times. This distal characteristic, however, is retrospectively present in about half of attackers, and significantly discriminates between attackers and nonattackers (Meloy, Roshdi, et al., 2015; Meloy et al., 2019). Lastly, Mr. Hasson had no history of criminal violence. About 30% of

attackers studied have a violent criminal history (Gill, 2015; Meloy, Roshdi, et al., 2015; Meloy & Gill, 2016; Meloy et al., 2019), while most do not.

Mr. Hasson codes for 12 out of 18 total indicators (67%), including 5 of the 6 proximal warning behaviors that are most commonly present in successful attackers. Mr. Hasson's overall behavior and TRAP-18 indicators are not dissimilar to those attackers whom he arguably wanted to emulate. The research suggests that the distal characteristics do have sensitivity in detecting persons of concern, but it is not until proximal warning behaviors develop in a case that we see some specificity of prediction of risk for an attack (Böckler et al., 2020; Challacombe & Lucas, 2019; Goodwill & Meloy, 2019; Meloy et al., 2019, 2021).

The behavior of Christopher Hasson, when viewed through the lens of the TRAP-18, is very similar to other subjects who have committed acts of lone actor terrorism in North America and Europe. Research has empirically supported the model of the TRAP-18 as a valid risk assessment instrument regardless of the ideology of the terrorist (Meloy & Gill, 2016), and in one study had a positive predictive value of 0.80 and a negative predictive value of 0.93 when applied to samples of persons of concern for violent extremism (Böckler et al., 2020). Was there sufficient open-source data to render an opinion of risk of targeted violence? We think yes. Was the US Government justified in arresting, charging, and prosecuting Christopher Hasson for crimes that could be related to the planning and preparation for an attack? We leave that question to the reader to decide when comparing Hasson's TRAP-18 indicators to a growing body of nomothetic research on lone actor terrorists.

## Case Formulation and Management

One colleague's pithy remark, however, stands out: "risk assessment without risk management is a recipe for high blood pressure" (F. Farnham, personal communication, August 2021). The dynamic nature and urgency of threat assessment, moreover, is bound to threat management, and despite the revealing nomothetic comparison of the Hasson findings to other samples of terrorists, questions concerning the formulation and interventions in an individual case such as this remain unanswered. In *US v Christopher Hasson*, a choice was made to criminally prosecute him. In other scenarios, the choice may be to risk

manage the case without seeking criminal prosecution. Some cases will also move forward with parallel investigations, one focusing on protective intelligence and risk management, and the other focusing on the gathering of evidence for a possible criminal prosecution. Clarity of mission is key.

Comparison of a case to nomothetic data is important because it provides a contextual anchor, and sometimes a base rate (Clemmow et al., 2020), to locate the case among available and open source data sets of other lone actors: those who have attacked, those who have been thwarted, and those who prompted concern but had no intent to attack. But a formulation of risk in each case is dependent on the individualizing of risk through a determination of the relevance—what factors appear to be causally related to violence risk—and weight (importance) of the indicators. Such a formulation, guided by questions following the coding of the case, helps determine both the tactics and long-term strategy for management. In this particular case, for example, the presence of any one proximal warning behavior, when in fact there were multiple, compels active management rather than just monitoring of the case (Meloy, 2017). Looking deeper into the relevance of the proximal warning behaviors, the presence of pathway (late stage markers that appeared to indicate research, planning, and preparation) and identification (as a soldier for white supremacy) become most heavily weighted since they are two of the three warning behaviors that have most reliably distinguished attackers from nonattackers (Meloy et al., 2019). The one proximal warning behavior missing, last resort, typically occurs in the hours, days, or weeks before an attack, and it may be too late to intervene.<sup>1</sup>

Likewise, the years long duration of the ideological framing (neo-Nazism) in this case, joined with both his personal grievance (the marriage of his daughter to a Black man) and his moral outrage (the demise of white supremacy), suggest both their relevance and the constellating of key distal factors that have been shown to be central to the developing narrative of many lone actor terrorists as they sequentially move on a pathway toward violence (Meloy et al., 2021). The end point of formulation is to develop a nonfictional story of the individual case, told with vetted evidence, that describes in detail and over time the nature and severity of the case in language that

can be clearly understood by the *consumer* of the formulation. As Logan (2017, p.157) has eloquently written,

In the main, formulations are presented as a piece of narrative text—multiple sentences describing the author’s professional understanding of the client that is its subject as if it were a story. The emphasis in narrative formulations is on clarity of exposition and brevity . . . Consequently, they can take time and effort to write. In doing so, its author should be reminded of the letter Benjamin Franklin wrote in 1750 describing his groundbreaking experiments involving electricity and sent to a member of the Royal Society in London. In his letter, Franklin apologized for the length of his report: “I have made this paper too long, for which I must crave pardon not having now time to make it shorter” (Henry & Cave, 1754, p. 82).

We offer a series of questions to present a formulation of risk in a case such as the Hasson matter (Meloy, 2017):

1. What TRAP-18 indicators appear to be most relevant and important?
2. Are there case-relevant risk factors not addressed in the TRAP-18?
3. If no efforts are made to monitor or risk manage this subject, what is the likelihood of violence?
4. If targeted violence did occur, what would be the likely tactics (weapons, location, time, approach behavior) and targets (individual, group, location)?
5. What is the likely audience for this act of lone actor terrorism?
6. Have all possible risk scenarios, even the most implausible, been considered?<sup>2</sup>
7. What specific protective factors or buffers against violence do you see in this case, and are they static (age, gender) or dynamic (e.g., drug use, weapons purchase)?
8. What steps can be taken (considering urgency of the possible act, sequence of

<sup>1</sup> Anecdotal evidence gathered by the second author indicates that last resort warning behavior, often bundled with leakage, is increasingly shared via social media and often in the hours before the attack, reducing the likelihood of a successful intervention.

<sup>2</sup> Scenario-based premortem planning has been developed by Phillip van Saun (personal communication, August 2021) and others (Klein, 2007). Such planning has been devised to help risk management teams formulate and challenge their assumptions about possible scenarios going forward in time, and adjust their interventions accordingly as new information emerges.

proximal and distal indicators in a particular case, and the designated intervention personnel) to manage risk, taking into account all relevant biological, psychological, and social *mitigating* factors?

9. What immediate circumstances might exacerbate his risk of an attack?
10. When the case formulation is finished, is he most likely in your opinion to be an actor, a facilitator, or only a supporter of terrorist violence?

In the Hasson case, the military setting provided its own complexities, and in similar cases would need to be carefully considered in the planning of interventions, whether protective management or criminal prosecution, or both (Rutz, 2021). Palarea and Van Horn (2010) offer a particularly cogent model for establishing controls in five domains for a comprehensive threat management plan: organizational, psychological, social, physical, and legal (Tobin & Palarea, 2021). Kropp and Hart (2015) have advanced our understanding and application of scenario planning to threat management by considering relevant factors in a case which may motivate, disinhibit, or destabilize the perpetrator's decision to be violent—and the consequential plan to supervise, treat, and ensure victim safety.

In considering the use of the TRAP-18 for assessment, formulation, and management of a potential case of lone actor terrorism; however, it is important to recognize its limitations. The TRAP-18 does not specifically assess protective factors, which often do not receive the attention they deserve; such bias contributes to the general overprediction of risk among threat assessors, particularly with very low base rate events such as acts of terrorism; and the TRAP-18 should not be considered a stand alone instrument. Other structured professional judgment instruments such as the HCR-20 V3 (Douglas et al., 2013) and the VERA 2 R (Pressman et al., 2016) can both improve the threat assessment team's overall strategic planning to mitigate risk. The mistake that threat assessment teams make is to *not* use any structured professional judgment instruments.

## Conclusion

We have conducted a study to test the ecological validity of the TRAP-18 in a case in which the

subject was criminally prosecuted *before* an act of terrorism. Utilizing both comparative nomothetic data, as well as methods to individualize the risk assessment of this particular case, it appears that the TRAP-18 is a useful structured professional judgment instrument for such a task.

## References

- Adamczyk, A., Gruenewald, J., Chermak, S. M., & Freilich, J. D. (2014). The relationship between hate groups and far-right ideological violence. *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice*, 30(3), 310–332. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1043986214536659>
- Anti-Defamation League. (2020). *Murder and extremism in the United States in 2019*. <https://www.adl.org/media/14107/download>
- Atkinson, D. C. (2018). Charlottesville and the alt-right: A turning point? *Politics, Groups & Identities*, 6(2), 309–315. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21565503.2018.1454330>
- Böckler, N., Allwinn, M., Metwaly, C., Wypych, B., Hoffmann, J., & Zick, A. (2020). Islamist terrorists in Germany and their warning behaviors: A comparative assessment of attackers and other convicts using the TRAP-18. *Journal of Threat Assessment and Management*, 7(3–4), 157–172. <https://doi.org/10.1037/tam0000150>
- Böckler, N., Hoffmann, J., & Meloy, J. R. (2017). “Jihad against the enemies of allah”: The Berlin Christmas market attack from a threat assessment perspective. *Violence and Gender*, 4(3), 73–80. <https://doi.org/10.1089/vio.2017.0040>
- Böckler, N., Hoffmann, J., & Zick, A. (2016). The Frankfurt airport attack: A case study on the radicalization of a lone-actor terrorist. *Journal of Threat Assessment and Management*, 2(3–4), 153–163. <https://doi.org/10.1037/tam0000045>
- Calhoun, F., & Weston, S. (2003). *Contemporary threat management*. Specialized Training Services.
- Capellan, J. A. (2015). Lone wolf terrorist or deranged shooter? A study of ideological active shooter events in the United States, 1970–2014. *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 38(6), 395–413. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2015.1008341>
- Challacombe, D. J., & Lucas, P. A. (2019). Postdicting violence with sovereign citizen actors: An exploratory test of the TRAP-18. *Journal of Threat Assessment and Management*, 6(1), 51–59. <https://doi.org/10.1037/tam0000105>
- Christian Identity. (n.d.) *Anti-Defamation League*. <https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounders/christian-identity>
- Clemmow, C., Schumann, S., Salman, N. L., & Gill, P. (2020). The base rate study: Developing base rates for risk factors and indicators for

- engagement in violent extremism. *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, 65(3), 865–881. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1556-4029.14282>
- Davis, J. (2018). Enforcing Christian nationalism: Examining the link between group identity and punitive attitudes in the United States. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 57(2), 300–317. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jssr.12510>
- Davis, J. T. (2018). Funding God's policies, defending whiteness: Christian nationalism and whites' attitudes towards racially-coded government spending. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 42(12), 2123–2142. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2018.1527939>
- Douglas, K., Hart, S., Webster, C., & Belfrage, H. (2013). *HCR-20 V3: Assessing risk of violence—user guide*. Mental Health, Law, and Policy Institute, Simon Fraser University.
- Echo. (n.d.). *Anti-defamation league*. <https://www.adl.org/education/references/hate-symbols/echo>
- Erlandsson, Å., & Reid Meloy, J. (2018). The Swedish school attack in Trollhättan. *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, 63(6), 1917–1927. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1556-4029.13800>
- Gill, P. (2015). *Lone-actor terrorists*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315766348>
- Gill, P., Clemmow, C., Hetzel, F., Rottweiler, B., Salman, N., Van Der Vegt, I., Marchment, Z., Schumann, S., Zolghadriha, S., Schulten, N., & Taylor, H. (2021). Systematic review of mental health problems and violent extremism. *Journal of Forensic Psychiatry & Psychology*, 32(1), 51–78. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14789949.2020.1820067>
- Goodwill, A., & Meloy, J. R. (2019). Visualizing the relationship among indicators for lone actor terrorist attacks: Multidimensional scaling and the TRAP-18. *Behavioral Sciences & the Law*, 37(5), 522–539. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bsl.2434>
- Gruenewald, J., & Pridemore, W. A. (2012). A comparison of ideologically-motivated homicides from the new extremist crime database and homicides from the supplementary homicide reports using multiple imputation by chained equations to handle missing values. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 28, 141–162. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10940-011-9155-5>
- Hall, D. L., Matz, D. C., & Wood, W. (2010). Why don't we practice what we preach? A meta-analytic review of religious racism. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 14(1), 126–139. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1088868309352179>
- Henry, D., & Cave, R. (1754). *New experiments and observations on electricity made at Philadelphia in America* (2nd ed.). Austrian National Library.
- Holt, T. J., Freilich, J. D., & Chermak, S. M. (2020). Examining the online expression of ideology among far-right extremist forum users. *Terrorism and Political Violence*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2019.1701446>
- Institute for Economics and Peace. (2020). *Global terrorism index 2020: Measuring the impact of terrorism*. <https://visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/GTI-2020-web-1.pdf>
- Jones, S. G., Doxsee, C., Harrington, N., Hwang, G., & Suber, J. (2020). *The war comes home: The evolution of domestic terrorism in the United States*. Center for Strategic & International Studies. [https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/201021\\_Jones\\_War\\_Comes\\_Home\\_v2.pdf](https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/201021_Jones_War_Comes_Home_v2.pdf)
- Klein, B. R., Gruenewald, J., & Smith, B. L. (2016). Opportunity, group structure, temporal patterns, and successful outcomes of far-right terrorism incidents in the United States. *Crime and Delinquency*, 63(10), 1224–1249. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011128716654925>
- Klein, G. (2007). Performing a project premortem. *Harvard Business Review*, 85(9), 18–19. <https://doi.org/10.1109/EMR.2008.4534313>
- Kropp, R., & Hart, S. (2015). *Manual for the spousal assault risk assessment guide* (3rd ed.). Protect International.
- Logan, C. (2017). Formulation for forensic practitioners. In R. Roesch & A. Cook (Eds.), *Handbook of forensic mental health services* (pp. 153–178). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315627823-6>
- McDaniel, E. L., Nooruddin, I., & Shortle, A. F. (2011). Divine boundaries: How religion shapes citizens' attitudes toward immigrants. *American Politics Research*, 39(1), 205–233. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673X10371300>
- Meloy, J. R. (2017). *Terrorist radicalization assessment protocol (TRAP-18) user's manual 1.0*. Multihealth Systems.
- Meloy, J. R., & Genzman, J. (2016). The clinical threat assessment of the lone-actor terrorist. *The Psychiatric Clinics of North America*, 39(4), 649–662. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psc.2016.07.004>
- Meloy, J. R., & Gill, P. (2016). The lone-actor terrorist and the TRAP-18. *Journal of Threat Assessment and Management*, 3(1), 37–52. <https://doi.org/10.1037/tam0000061>
- Meloy, J. R., Goodwill, A., Clemmow, C., & Gill, P. (2021). Time sequencing the TRAP-18 indicators. *Journal of Threat Assessment and Management*, 8, 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1037/tam0000157>
- Meloy, J. R., Goodwill, A. M., Meloy, M. J., Amat, G., Martinez, M., & Morgan, M. (2019). Some TRAP-19 indicators discriminate between terrorist attackers and other subjects of national security concern. *Journal of Threat Assessment and Management*, 6(2), 93–110. <https://doi.org/10.1037/tam0000119>
- Meloy, J. R., Habermeyer, E., & Guldinann, A. (2015). The warning behaviors of Anders Breivik. *Journal of Threat Assessment and Management*, 2(3–4), 164–175. <https://doi.org/10.1037/tam0000037>



- Meloy, J. R., Roshdi, K., Glaz-Ocik, J., & Hoffmann, J. (2015). Investigating the individual terrorist in Europe. *Journal of Threat Assessment and Management*, 2(3–4), 140–152. <https://doi.org/10.1037/tam0000036>
- Meloy, J. R., & Hoffmann, J. (Eds.). (2021). *International handbook of threat assessment* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Miller-Idriss, C. (2020). *Hate in the homeland*. Princeton University Press.
- Mohandie, K., & Duffy, J. E. (1999). Understanding subjects with paranoid schizophrenia. *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, 68(12), 8–16. <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/understanding-subjects-paranoid-schizophrenia>
- Office of the Director of National Intelligence. (2021). *Domestic violent extremism poses heightened threat in 2021*. <https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/UnclassSummaryofDVEAssessment-17MAR21.pdf>
- Palarea, R., & Van Horn, D. (2010, August). *From assessment to management: Developing case specific management plans*. Presentation at the conference of the Association of Threat Assessment Professionals, Anaheim, CA.
- Parkin, W. S., Freilich, J. D., & Chermak, S. M. (2015). Ideological victimization: Homicides perpetrated by far-right extremists. *Homicide Studies*, 19(3), 211–236. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1088767914529952>
- Perliger, A. (2020). *American zealots*. Columbia University Press.
- Perry, B., & Blazak, R. (2010). Places for races: The white supremacist movement imagines U.S. geography. *Journal of Hate Studies*, 8(1), 29–51. <https://doi.org/10.33972/jhs.67>
- Perry, S. L., & Whitehead, A. L. (2015). Christian nationalism and white racial boundaries: Examining whites' opposition to interracial marriage. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 38(10), 1671–1689. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2015.1015584>
- Perry, S. L., Whitehead, A. L., & Davis, J. T. (2018). God's country in black and blue: How Christian nationalism shapes Americans' views about police (mis)treatment of Blacks. *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity (Thousand Oaks, Calif.)*, 5(1), 130–146. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2332649218790983>
- Piazza, J. A. (2017). The determinants of domestic right-wing terrorism in the USA: Economic grievance, societal change and political resentment. *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, 34(1), 52–80. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0738894215570429>
- Pressman, E., Duits, N., Rinne, T., & Flockton, J. (2016). *VERA-2R violence extremism risk assessment—version 2 revised*. NIFFP.
- Quek, N. (2019). *Bloodbath in Christchurch: The rise of far-right terrorism*. *RSIS Commentary*, 047. <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/CO19047.pdf>
- Rutz, S. (2021). Mitigating harm in the military: A military service approach to threat assessment and management. In J. R. Meloy & J. Hoffmann (Eds.), *International handbook of threat assessment* (2nd ed., pp. 612–623). Oxford University Press.
- Samuel, S. (2017, November 2). *What to do when racists try to hijack your religion*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/11/asatru-heathenry-racism/543864/>
- Southern Poverty Law Center. (2020). *In 2020, We Tracked 838 Hate Groups Across the U.S.* (n.d.) Southern Poverty Law Center. <https://www.splcenter.org/hate-map>
- Sweeney, M., & Perliger, A. (2018). Explaining the spontaneous nature of far-right violence in the United States. *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 12(6), 52–71
- Tobin, C., & Palarea, R. (2021). Protective intelligence: threat assessment and management considerations. In J. R. Meloy & J. Hoffmann (Eds.), *International handbook of threat assessment* (2nd ed., pp. 360–373). Oxford University Press.
- United States of America v. Christopher Paul Hasson. (2020a). *Document 104: Government's Memorandum in Aid of Sentencing, Criminal No. GJH-19-96*. United States District Court for the District of Maryland.
- United States of America v. Christopher Paul Hasson. (2020b). *Document 100: Defense Sentencing Memo, Criminal Case No. 19-cr-0096-GJH*. Office of the Federal Public Defender District of Maryland.
- United States of America v. Christopher Paul Hasson. (2020c). *Document 115-20: Exhibit 19, Report of US Coast Guard Insider Threat Program, Case 8:19-cr-00096-GJH*. U.S. Department of Homeland Security, United States Coast Guard.
- United States of America v. Christopher Paul Hasson. (2020d). *Transcript of Proceedings—Sentencing Hearing, Case Number 8:19-cr-00096-GJH*. United States District Court Southern District of Maryland.

Received May 27, 2021

Revision received September 9, 2021

Accepted October 27, 2021 ■