



The So-Called ‘Lone Wolf’ Phenomenon

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4.1 INTRODUCTION

In recent years several terrorist attacks have occurred in Italy, the USA, France, Germany and other countries that were commonly perpetrated by one individual and have led to the adoption of the phrase ‘lone wolf’ among the media and academic circles alike. The main point to consider is whether these are merely single incidents or if a new threat is arising in contemporary society. A key question is the motivation of this new type of attack; are they carried out alone or is there a strategy behind it? Will we see a rise of attacks in local communities and will local security services be prepared to handle such an attack? Social media plays a growing role in the radicalisation process and the material posted online is constantly rising. In many cases, *lone wolves* have not been under previous observations and were living undetected within society labelled as ‘regular’ citizens.

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These threats raised have for some time been topics of discussion among local communities with most people believing that the quantity of threats is increasing; meanwhile the feelings of safety among citizens are decreasing (Kury 2002: 343).

The number of offenders acting alone has continuously risen and the reasons are diverse. In the past these attacks were not largely recognised by the public as they are now, because the damage was not to the same extent and often they were not seen as newsworthy, but it is not a new phenomenon. The reasons for the rise are many. Globalisation is a strong driver, because ideas and ideologies are no longer limited to a specific region which consequently means terrorist activity is spread easier among borders and nations. Technical innovation makes communication global and cheap, allowing many offenders to communicate with their leaders for instructions shortly before or during the attacks. In addition, mass media is a strong driver allowing information to be shared globally almost instantaneously and multiplied in all channels, leaving citizens with the impression that the threat is bigger than before and their life is more at risk. This is related to the amplification of the mass media which has produced a wider amount of different information channels alongside the fact that social media as a source for information has increased its role tremendously in the recent years. More than half of the world's population has access and is using the Internet (Internet World Stats 2016), which allows users to retrieve information from different forums and websites, so that the traditional way of gathering information loses more and more its importance. One of the effects is also that the omnipresence of information about a terrorist incident lowers the feeling of safety among citizens consequently leading to the impression that the situation is more serious than the reality.

The promotion of terrorist acts throughout the world is a side effect of all these above aspects of globalisation used by terrorist organisations to promote their ideas. Many 'lone wolf' terrorists do have contact with others, communicate and hold the belief that they are part of a bigger group or at least of a certain ideology.

For law enforcement agencies it is crucial to look at previous cases to find a way to intervene at the earliest possible stage to prevent these types of attacks. Intervention stages may be very early, if an individual shows a certain behaviour or in the pre-attack phase. The third possibility of intervention is during the attack. The following six case studies of so-called 'lone wolf' attacks are reviewed from different countries and also with a different ideological background.

4.2 CASE STUDIES

4.2.1 *German Case Study: Anis Amri*

On the 16th of December 2016, Anis Amri killed a Polish lorry driver and stole his van where he drove into a Berlin Christmas market at the Breitscheidplatz (close to the Gedächtniskirche) killing 11 people. He was fleeing through several countries in Europe and was killed by Italian policeman on the 23rd of December 2016 in Milano, Italy.

Amri was born in 1992 in a small village called Farhat Achet in the North of Tunisia; his father worked as a temporary farm worker and had four sons and five daughters. In the 1990s Tunisia was a dictatorship which held low standards and hope for young people for a better life with more wealth. His father states that Anis Amri completed his A levels, but one of his brothers denies the claim and states that Anis left school after the eighth class. There are no hints that religion played a role in his early years as Amri was seen in bars drinking, smoking and consuming drugs that brought him into his first contact with the police. Following the altercation he had to pay 2000 Dinar and was imprisoned for 1 year (Biermann et al. 2016).

His criminal record increased and among other crimes he stole a van in the city of Kairouan. After the so-called Arab Spring, the uprising of citizens against their government in the Arab World, which started in Tunisia, in 2011 Amri travelled by boat to Italy and reached the island Lampedusa, where he said that he was young enough to get into a camp for unaccompanied minors. There are some differences in various sources of what happened next, but it is clear that Amri pillaged a public building in Italy and was sentenced to 4 years in Sicily. He was released in 2015 after the whole sentence, because he was aggressive whilst carrying out his sentence. It is unclear if Amri had his first contact to the Salafi scene in prison, but this might have been his first contact with radical Islam (Sydow 2016).

The Italian Government tried to return him to Tunisia, but the Tunisian authorities did not cooperate and denied his return. As a result he was brought into another camp, where he decided to go via Switzerland to Germany (Biermann et al. 2016).

In Germany he claimed asylum as an Egyptian, which was rejected as the officials did not believe his claims. Furthermore he was travelling through the country with different identities and was arrested with forged Italian documents. Again the German authorities argued he should be

sent back to his home country, but the Tunisian government continued to deny that he was a citizen of the country. He made contact with the German Salafists where he met Abu Waala among others, who are known to be responsible for sending individuals to Syria to fight for the so-called 'Islamic State' (Sydow 2016). Amri was in the focus of the German law enforcement agencies already at a very early stage, but he managed to move freely. He was looking for the company of Salafists, but was also involved in various violent crimes and continued to use drugs. In total he was using 14 different identities during his time in Germany (Zeit online 2017).

Amri communicated with jihadists with his HTC smartphone and visited the Christmas market twice before. On one occasion, he made a video to prepare his attack which was undetected, as the observation of his smartphone stopped in September due to officials believing that he was now a drug dealer and not a threat in a terrorist context. On the first of November 2016, he swore his oath to the head of the 'Islamic State'. The attack was not planned as a suicide attack, so he aimed to leave the country where maybe there were plans of further attacks in Europe (Junginger 2017). Also, refer to Chap. 12 on how a British teenager was mentored and radicalised by the Islamic State's recruiters/jihadis online.

4.2.2 *Canadian Case Study: Marc Lépine*

On the sixth of December 1989 a 25-year-old Marc Lépine brandished a firearm and burst into a college classroom at the École Polytechnique in Montreal, Canada, killing 14 female students within 20 min. By the time Lépine turned the gun on himself, another ten were injured. He was armed with a legally obtained Mini-14 rifle and a hunting knife. Lépine had previously been denied admission to the École Polytechnique and had been upset; it later transpired, about women working in positions traditionally occupied by men (Bindel 2012) and in particular the women who were accepted at the École Polytechnique. He held a strong hatred against feminists and women in general and pointed out 19 women he hated most in his claimed 'fight against feminism'. Lépine, whose original name was Gamil Rodrigue Liass Gharbi, was the son of a Canadian nurse and an Algerian investment banker and he was known to be a normal teenager (Bejsment 2014). He had a stable job for several years until 1988, which in between he was unemployed for a couple of months in 1986 where he applied for a job at the Polytechnique. After his unemployment in March

1988, he took courses on data management, but abandoned them later. In 1989 he completed a chemistry course and asked the Sûreté of Quebec for a firearms permission which he was granted. One day before the attack he rented a car, which was found after the attack close by the Université de Montréal. Lépine was very familiar with the scene, because he has visited the campus several times (Report of the Coroner’s Investigation 1991:17f). He planned his attack carefully—he attacked the university he dreamed to study at, in a local community that was unprepared for any activity of that kind. The Canadian government annually commemorates the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women, also known informally as White Ribbon Day, on the sixth of December (Wyborcza 2012). The coroner’s investigation report (1991: 18f) states that Lépine did show signs of suicidal tendencies and he wrote two documents that prove his hatred towards women.

4.2.3 US Case Study: Ted Kaczynski

A US example of the ‘lone wolf’ activity as we may name it today was the story of Ted Kaczynski, also known as *the Unabomber* (for the UNiversity and Airline BOMBing targets involved). Kaczynski came to world attention in 1978 with the explosion of his first, primitive homemade bomb at a Chicago university. ‘Over the next 17 years, he mailed or hand delivered a series of increasingly sophisticated bombs that killed three Americans and injured 24 more’ (FBI 2008: 1). At the age of 16, Kaczynski was accepted to Harvard University where he then enrolled into the University of Michigan, earning a PhD in mathematics, and taught undergraduate courses in geometry and calculus at the University of California at Berkeley for a short time. After sending his last letter bomb in 1995, he was not caught by FBI for a long duration. In the USA he was considered as a serious terrorist until the 11th of September 2001. The criminal activity of Ted Kaczynski was strongly related to his manifesto published in 1995. He claimed:

The Industrial Revolution and its consequences have been a disaster for the human race. They have greatly increased the life-expectancy of those of us who live in advanced countries, but they have destabilized society, have made life unfulfilling, have subjected human beings to indignities, have led to widespread psychological suffering (in the Third World to physical suffering as well) and have inflicted severe damage on the natural world. The continued development of technology will worsen the situation. (UPI 1995: 1)

Kaczynski did his studies in university in a very short time. His ideology can be seen as very unique, as he is gravely against the modern industrial society especially universities and airlines. Therefore, his first attacks were against these targets. The Unabomber is a good example that a ‘lone wolf’ terrorist with a certain grade of intelligence is hard to find, because he was talking about his ideology to his brother, who went in the end to the FBI, but overall he was living particularly clandestine. After he was sentenced to four life sentences, Kaczynski wrote an article for an anarchistic paper in Berkeley, which was published in 1999 (Spiegel Online 1999). His figure was brought to world’s mind by Anders Breivik—another example of a contemporary ‘lone wolf’ criminal. For a detailed discussion on processes in and through which individuals are radicalised into acts of terrorism, see Chap. 12.

4.2.4 *Norwegian Case Study: Anders Behring Breivik*

Anders Behring Breivik was a terrorist that conducted two sequential attacks against the government, civilian population and the Workers’ Youth League (AUF) in Norway on the 22nd of July 2011. Breivik, aged 32 and a far-right fanatic, killed eight people at Oslo’s government quarters with a car bomb, before murdering 69 Norwegian Labour Party youth members on the island of Utoya, and seriously injured 33 people (Biography 2014). It was described that in court ‘Breivik was standing with his hands held above his head in passive surrender when police has finally caught up with him at the end of his gun rampage’ (Rayner 2011: 1), saying he is ready to fight even from the jail (Walat et al. 2011: 8ff). He was sentenced to 21 years in prison, as it was verified that he was acting on his own and used simple measures such as firearms and bombs in planning the attack for over 3 years. Two main motives are political and religious ones. Before the Norwegian massacre Breivik published ‘2083 A *European Declaration of Independence*’, writing that he wanted to stop ‘the Islamic colonisation’ in Europe as well as the rise of cultural Marxism and multiculturalism, mainly Islam (Berwick 2011: 2). This ideology led him to commit the terrorist act, which with his work he legitimised his attack. He believed that Muslims are conquering Norway and that the Norwegian Social Democratic Party is responsible for this. Therefore, he thought that killing the future of the party will help to solve the ‘problem’.

Breivik always wanted to be economically successful, and in his early years he was tagging walls in Oslo, but friends described him as anxious.

Then he joined a right-wing party and after working for 10 years he left, because the party did not hold the same extreme ideology and he did not get the position in the party that he wanted. Despite the fact that he was unemployed since 2006, his wealth was constantly growing. At the age of 27 he had to move back to his mother, because he couldn’t afford an apartment by himself. He tried to join forums and blogs on the extreme right, but because of his different views he was rejected there as well (Seierstad 2016). In the years before the attack he persisted to try and communicate his ideology with different groups, but he did not succeed. The preparation of the attack took him at least 3 years.

4.2.5 *Russian Case Study: Dmitry Vinogradov*

In Russia few years ago there was a terrorist act conducted by a ‘lone wolf’, a 30-year-old named Dmitry Vinogradov. On the seventh of November 2012, Vinogradov, a lawyer for a pharmaceutical company in Moscow, shot dead six people and severely wounded another two. Later, he claimed his motive was a broken heart, as he split up with the girl working in the same company several months before. His claim is hard to believe as few hours before his attack, Vinogradov posted a ‘manifesto of hate’ on the Internet comparing mankind to a ‘giant cancer tumour’, which drew immediate comparisons with Norwegian mass killer Anders Breivik. In his manifesto, Vinogradov said (quoted in Berwick 2011: 2):

I hate human society and I am disgusted to be a part of it! I hate the senselessness of human life! I hate this very life! I see only one way to justify it to destroy as many parts of the human compost as possible. This is the only right thing which everyone can do in his life, it is the only way to justify it, the only way to make this world better.

According to the content he informed himself via the Internet and tried to communicate there as well. Vinogradov, just like Marc Lépine, attacked in his very local community, shooting his work colleagues.

4.2.6 *Tunisian Case Study: Seifeddine Rezgui Yaoubi*

In June 2015 there was the deadliest terrorist attack in the history of modern Tunisia. About 10 km north of the city Sousse, a 23-year-old Seifeddine

Rezgui Yacoubi shot down 39 people, mostly tourists from Great Britain, Germany and Belgium (Newsweek Polska 2015). He was a student of electric engineering, who had links with the Islamic State. He came from the city of Kairouan, which is a centre of Salafists in Tunisia. His fighting alias name leads to that as well: Abu Jahja al-Kairuani (SZ online 2015). The attack was suspected to be supported by two other people and was a protest expressing Muslims' dissatisfaction with the actions performed by Western leaders. As in 2015 there was a massive amount of material in the Internet and social media and Yacoubi was a technical student; it was apparent that Yacoubi communicated via social media and the Internet. It should also be noted that in the small French village of Saint-Quentin-Fallavier a 35-year-old Yassine Salhi tried to blow up a local gas-fired plant which supplied gas in the local community in the same month that he was associated with. In the crime scene there was a headless body found (most likely his boss) and flags with Arabic inscriptions that indicate links with the Islamic State (Newsweek Polska 2015). Both attacks can be recognised as a 'lone wolf' activity.

4.3 FINDINGS

The presented case studies show that in the recent years the terrorist activity of a single person or a small group of individuals has intensified and become a serious threat to any state and its citizens. Particular groups such as the Islamic State try to push individuals forward to commit attacks, as it was published in their own e-zines and videos. The perpetrators were acting in different public places like universities, beaches or offices. Very often this is happening in local communities like the cases of the Unabomber, but also the cases of the attacks in Ansbach and Würzburg in Germany 2016. After 2011 the numbers of 'lone wolf' attacks have rapidly increased on a global scale. There were incidents in Germany, the USA, Canada, France and Russia. This shows that the phenomenon is not typical for a country or a region, but has become an international phenomenon.

The 'lone wolf' term was popularised by the extreme right American in the nineties which the leaders encouraged single individuals or small groups to attack the government (Łachacz 2013: 74). Before 2011 the phenomenon and school shootings were quite rare, along with the attention that they produce. After the intensifying of the phenomenon security experts and academics had a problem in defining it.

In academic literature there are various definitions on a 'lone wolf' attacker. Recently, the most common definition is that a 'lone wolf' is an individual, usually not openly involved with any terrorist organisation, who conducts a terrorist attack (Kaplan et al. 2014). This perspective emphasises the self-determination of the attacker, despite any methods that were used. According to Weimann (2012), a 'lone wolf' is an individualist or a small group of people who use typical terrorist tactics, including attacks on civilians, in order to achieve political or ideological goals. They mostly act without any membership, internal cooperation or any support from a particular terrorist organisation, either official or unofficial acting self-reliant and having a goal that should be achieved. Furthermore, Spaaij (2012) indicates that a 'lone wolf' is a dangerous leader, antisocial outsider and unpredictable individual. Some cases might question the leader position of Spaaij, as neither Breivik nor the first Islamist terrorist in Germany Arid Uka who killed American soldiers in a bus at Frankfurt airport was the leader.

Generally the experts in the field of security agree that a 'lone wolf' is a 'self-determined individual, acting alone by attacking civilians' (Łachacz 2013: 74). However, there are several differences that can be described as well.

Undoubtedly, a 'lone wolf' terrorist is a person acting independently, formally not belonging to any organised terrorist group or network. Their attacks are usually well thought out and planned. A perfect example here is Anders Breivik, who planned the massacre for over 3 years. According to Spaaij (2012) any attack begins and is controlled by the individual, the 'lone wolf' himself; there is no executive or hierarchy.

The nature of the phenomenon includes that the individual does not exchange information on the attack with anyone, but that does not mean that the perpetrator does not communicate about his ideas and ideology. In most of the cases the offenders did not have contact to others.

The identification of an offender is extremely difficult as they have limited communication to the outside world and no exchange of information about the attack. They are influenced by a radical ideology on an independent level, but they are not supported by other parties or organisations and the terrorist act is committed by the individual without any support (Becker 2014:970). Providing sympathy towards individuals with radical ideologies is used by extremist groups like the Islamic State to persuade them to commit violent acts, such as the case in Tunisia, Germany 2016 or the case of Arid Uka. Most of the offenders had a political or religious

ideology as a legitimisation of their attack; Breivik hated Muslims and communists, Kaczynski rejected the technological progress, Lépine hated women and Vinogradov hated the human race in general. Not all, but most of the offenders try to publish any kind of manifesto or other forms of publication.

New technologies like social media play an important role for getting information about carrying out the attack such as the building of a bomb or to gain support of the ideology like Breivik tried to. Also Kaczynski wanted to have his manifesto published in two transnational papers in order to gain followers. Simon (2013) draws the attention to the importance of technology, especially the Internet, as a source of accessing practical tips and instructions for any potential ‘lone wolf’.

In addition, it is worth noting that a ‘lone wolf’ is often a young male, well educated, with some having well-paid jobs. For example, Kaczynski, having his doctoral degree, had worked as a mathematician at the university, Vinogradov was a lawyer and Breivik had a good education as his father was a diplomat. They all were in some sense *extraordinary individuals*, conscious of both undertaken actions and its consequences. But this does not necessarily have to be the case as the attacks in London where Amri probably did not even finish his school education or in Berlin show that higher education is not essential. The attackers were all timid and unsociable individuals showing that behavioural factors are also crucial in the detection. The age of ‘lone wolfs’ should be also emphasised as whilst conducting the attack most of the attackers were between 20 and 30 years old.

The final characteristic for the ‘lone wolf’ terrorism is the location of where the attack takes place. Very often it is a local community where the individual lives, studies or works in. All of the attacks described in this article took place in a public space. In a long-term perspective the attacks may result in the cohesion of local communities, as the ‘lone wolf’ might be an individual’s neighbour, work colleague or friend from the university.

4.4 DISCUSSION

In summing up the number of ‘lone wolf’ attacks, individual attacks have significantly increased in the recent years, happening regularly in various countries across the world. Law enforcement agencies face the problem of detecting the threat and intervening before the attack takes place. These incidents threaten the functioning of the state and their societies. The

'lone wolf' phenomenon is an individual activity where the detection is difficult because of the communication techniques and that the perpetrators are acting alone. All of the offenders are trying to kill as many innocent citizens as possible.

Comparing the case studies this article shows that the attackers' intelligence and methodology (e.g. not being a suicide bomber) makes the detection of the offender very difficult, as seen in the Ted Kaczynski case. His cause was also very different to others, so it is harder to detect and the emotion is there, but not spontaneous.

As most of the offenders are young individuals, introvert and self-determinate, a certain behaviour should be observed. Obviously not all introvert individuals are most likely a 'lone wolf'. This is certainly not enough, but there is research necessary to find methods to identify persons at risk without stigmatising the identity of attackers. For security agencies it is crucial and important to detect possible terrorist attacks as soon as possible. Behaviour is one of the key factors. There are factors which can be structured in a way that individuals can be dealt with without stigmatising them in a way that will help to prevent further violent extremism. Most of the past offenders had next to their individual behaviour linked to political or religious beliefs. It can be observed that many terrorists are linked to a greater group like the so-called 'Islamic State'. In addition it is noteworthy that there are also individuals whose attacks and motives remain unknown, which mental problems should not be taken as the only motive for the attack. Somehow, their activity has increased in the past years, just the same as the number of *typical* 'lone wolf' attacks. Most of the 'lone wolves' were usually described as an ordinary citizen, work colleague or a friend from the university.

Another important aspect is the use of social media by these offenders, which they use to try and gain or provide ideological information as well as information about how to carry out an attack. This might also be a key element in fighting this phenomenon, if the research on this field is successful.

Furthermore, the law enforcement agencies might have a chance to react appropriately, according to the before mentioned point, in the pre-attack phase. The information is dealt with correctly and the behavioural aspects are taken into consideration showing similarities between different actors despite the fact that they have completely different ideologies, eras and countries. Also the role of social media and the Internet should not be underestimated, as often information can be obtained here.

Lastly, in the response to the attacks the understanding of the ‘lone wolf’ helps to understand their modus operandi, by understanding their ideological background to gain knowledge about their communication to counter the attack with the lowest risk for citizens and security forces possible.

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