



ARMY OF ONE

Europe and its allies confront the phenomenon of *lone wolf extremism*

VEER

By *per Concordiam* Staff

A string of recent terrorist cases around the world demonstrates that disruptions caused by so-called lone wolves can be as dangerous as those caused by large terrorist groups: the Boston Marathon bombings, the murder of an off-duty soldier on the streets of London, the shooting rampage in Toulouse, France, and Anders Breivik's mass atrocity in Norway. With the advent of the Internet, a lone wolf terrorist has instant access to information about weapons and tactics, as well as the ability to link up with like-minded radicals. Some experts contend that individual violent extremists, often anonymous and resourceful, can be more dangerous than large terror groups whose intentions are broadcast on the Web.

In the United States, lone wolves were the first to introduce innovations such as destroying buildings with car bombs, exploding airliners in midair, tampering with sealed medicines and delivering anthrax and explosives in the mail. "The lone wolf has been the most innovative and creative in terms of terrorist tactics, including new forms of violence that the more established terrorist groups eventually adopt as their own," author Jeffrey D. Simon explained in his book *Lone Wolf Terrorism: Understanding the Growing Threat*.

CHANGING FACE OF EXTREMISM

Extremist groups have seen the effectiveness of the lone wolf and are trying to incorporate the single-person attack into their tactics. In the view of counterterrorism expert Shiraz Maher of the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation in London, al-Qaida was forced to re-evaluate its future when coalition forces in Afghanistan removed the Taliban from power and deprived al-Qaida of its training

grounds in the country. To remain relevant, al-Qaida strategist Abu Musab al-Suri devised a strategy of using smaller-scale attacks. Maher described the new approach as "go buy a knife, go stab somebody, it's impossible to stop," according to an article that appeared on CNN's website in May 2013. "Provided you pick a sensitive target, you can still cause absolute pandemonium."

The Internet plays a pivotal role for the lone wolf. It provides immediate information on homemade bomb-making, maps, photos and floor plans of possible targets, weapons and online surveillance. Computer links also provide details of attacks that failed, allowing lone wolves to learn from past mistakes and perfect tactics.

The Web can also breed communities of extremists. Breivik, for example, posted a 1,500-page online manifesto that blamed Norwegian politicians for the "Islamic colonization and Islamisation of Western Europe." After Breivik murdered dozens of his fellow citizens in 2011, many people read his manifesto out of curiosity. The Internet provides anonymity that didn't exist in the days when people checked books out of libraries or subscribed to magazines.

The Internet also played a role in the May 2013 daylight murder of Lee Rigby, a British soldier walking down a street near his barracks in Woolwich near London. As blood dripped from a knife and meat cleaver, one of the two attackers was captured on video shouting: "We swear by almighty



Michael Adebolajo was found guilty in December 2013 of murdering Fusilier Lee Rigby in a brutal attack in Woolwich, England, in May 2013. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS



Soldiers lay flowers at the scene of the killing of British soldier Lee Rigby in Woolwich, England, in May 2013. REUTERS

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Allah we will never stop fighting you until you leave us alone. ... This British soldier is an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth." In March 2012, Mohamed Merah, the gunman who admitted to killing three soldiers, three Jewish children and a rabbi in a killing spree in Toulouse, France, also publicized his actions on video. The British and French videos both found their way to the Internet, where they were seen by millions.

INCREASED VIGILANCE

Detecting every lone wolf is impossible. Only a minority of extremists turns to physical violence, and psychological research has struggled to identify terrorists before they strike. U.S. Homeland Security expert Erroll Southers cautions: "Singling out a person or entire community as suspect based on anything other than fact undermines the community cohesion we need to counter the persistent threat."

Nevertheless, security professionals can adopt preventive measures to reduce risk, and multinational intelligence sharing is critical. Closed-caption television (CCTV) played a critical role in capturing the Boston Marathon suspects. Nearby store cameras helped investigators identify the bombers and revealed how the attack occurred. Britain, China, India and the

U.S., have increased their use of CCTV for security purposes. Britain, sometimes called the CCTV capital, has nearly 2 million such cameras. Societies are debating how much privacy they're willing to surrender in the name of security.

Lone wolves often enjoy posting opinions online. If lone wolves are spouting a violent philosophy on the Web, law enforcement can track them and uncover their identities. Such monitoring could also detect purchases of bomb-making equipment and chemicals.

Opinions vary whether closer scrutiny of the Boston bombing suspects could have prevented the crime. Russia informed the FBI that bomber Tamerlan Tsarnaev had visited Russia in 2011 and planned to join radicals fighting in Chechnya. But an FBI investigation turned up no hard evidence that Tsarnaev was plotting an attack in the U.S. Uncovering such small extremist plots can be difficult, especially if the period from target to attack is short, and the number of plotters is limited. Bruce Riedel, an expert on radicalization, wrote in an article for the Yale Center for the Study of Globalization.

Larger plots are more prone to discovery. In 2006, on the fifth anniversary of the attacks of September 11, 2001, al-Qaida's plan to blow up eight or more jumbo jets between London and North America was foiled primarily because of its size and complexity. Phil Mudd, then-director of the Central Intelligence Agency Counter Terrorism Center, said the plot was built around a simple explosive device that could be smuggled on airplanes in soft drinks, but because the conspiracy involved a dozen British citizens working over the span of a month, it was easier for the authorities to infiltrate.

The emergence of the lone wolf has forced nations to change their way of thinking about extremism. Such terrorists do not need large sums of money or training in a faraway country to be successful. The lone wolf's biggest advantage is his anonymity. Exposing his secret world is one of the biggest challenges facing counterterrorism professionals. □