Researchers have traditionally viewed the relationship between media and terrorism in terms of the “contagion effect.” That is, widespread media coverage of a terrorist event creates a force multiplier for broader terrorist campaigns (e.g., Weimann and Winn, 1994). For example, during the early years of his reign as leader of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (1969-1974), Yasser Arafat recognized that international news organizations were fascinated with PLO airline hijackings and hostage taking. These terrorist events were made-for-TV dramas that not only showcased the PLO’s political struggle against Israel, but they also publicized the plight of the Palestinian people. The contagion effect was manifest. Terrorists from the Basque region of Spain came to the Middle East to train with the PLO, as did members of the Irish Republican Army, West Germany’s Baader-Meinhof gang (later the Red Army Faction), and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine with its charismatic leader Illich Ramirez Sanchez, better known to history as Carlos the Jackal (Follain, 1998). Moreover, media-reported terrorism caused more terrorism.

Often overlooked in this equation is how media and popular culture effects the way terrorists select their targets, design their tactics, and adopt their violent ideologies. That is the
purpose of this chapter. We concentrate exclusively on the lone actor—the single attacker who is
not affiliated with a larger terrorist network. This problem is especially relevant for the United
States and its Western allies in the post-9/11 era. According to the FBI, the greatest threat to U.S.
national security is not al-Qaeda or the Islamic State (ISIS) but the lone wolf terrorist.¹ The
following analysis is based on a study of American lone wolf terrorism we conducted for the
National Institute of Justice between 2012 and 2015 (Hamm and Spaaij, 2015). Our research
involved the creation of an extensive open-source database of all known cases of lone wolf
terrorism in the United States between 1940 and 2015, complemented by a case study component
involving interviews and correspondence with FBI agents, intelligence analysts, police officials,
and five lone wolf terrorists in prison. Included in the research is information on the role of
media and popular culture, issues that have gone unexamined in previous lone wolf studies. By
taking an historical view of lone wolf terrorism, we are able to determine how these influences
have evolved over time.

Media and cultural influences have important parallels with other forms of contemporary
violence, of course, including mass shootings. Like many acts of lone wolf terrorism, mass
shootings often arise from toxic combinations of violent media imagery, high-velocity firearms
and (white) male supremacy, providing the sociopolitical context in which violent masculinities
are produced and valorized. Anthropologist Elliot Leyton (2001: 27, 322, 360) notably argued
that mass shooters see themselves as “soldiers on a mission” as “unjust maltreated heroes
wreaking vengeance on their oppressors”; their protest is “not on behalf of others but only
themselves” in order to “relieve a burning grudge engendered by their failed ambition.” While
this has relevance for lone wolf terrorism, too, it fails to fully acknowledge the ways in which

lone wolf terrorists are shaped and motivated by ideology and how this process is influenced by those who have gone before and by extremist groups or movements with whom they identify. We provide a more sociological interpretation of these matters by linking lone wolf terrorism to engagement with a warrior subculture that fuses violence and politics with masculinity. This subcultural script provides a model for problem solving: it sensitizes (and socializes) the lone wolf to the cause and to the belief that a violent attack is both necessary and a transformative experience. We also provide an example showing that for some of the most lethal lone wolf terrorists in recent memory, interpersonal conflicts with women can act as a triggering event sparking their terrorist campaigns.

The Feedback Loop

At a general level, history teaches that the lone wolf terrorist is able to influence popular culture through his or her violence. Terrorists are often able to create a feedback loop through these media representations: Terrorists commit acts of violence; those acts are depicted in literature, film and music; and then others come along to imitate the media depictions in real life. A classic example is the assassination of civil right leader Medgar Evers by white supremacist Byron de la Beckwith in Jackson, Mississippi, on the night of June 12, 1963 (Massingill, 1994). The assassination inspired author Eudora Welty’s 1963 short story “Where is the Voice Coming From?”, one the first attempts at giving literary voice to the deep hatred of Southern white supremacy. The Evers assassination was also the subject of Nina Simone’s 1964 civil rights anthem “Mississippi Goddam” and Bob Dylan’s “Only a Pawn in Their Game,” a song played by Dylan at Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech before 250,000 on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. on August 23, 1963—the defining moment of the American Civil Rights Movement.

In the film, a local unemployed racist named Larry Shoemake was recruited to play the role of a pallbearer for one of the civil rights workers, a role that Shoemake later described in a suicide letter as his “contribution” to Southern history (Mitchell, 1999). Eight years after acting in *Mississippi Burning*—on the afternoon of April 12, 1996—Shoemake completed the feedback loop by arming himself with an assault rifle and twenty-thousand rounds of ammunition before going on a shooting rampage in a black neighborhood of Jackson, Mississippi, leaving nine dead and wounded, mostly women and children. Jackson was the city where Beckwith had assassinated Medgar Evers 33 years earlier.

**Media and Terrorist Intelligence**

The media can also provide lone wolves with information necessary for carrying out their attacks. Terrorism scholars refer to this as a form of *intelligence* (White, 2003). In this regard, no case is more important than the historic assassination of Martin Luther King. When Dr. King died at the hands of James Earl Ray in Memphis, Tennessee, on April 4, 1968, part of the nation’s conscience died with him. News of King’s assassination sparked riots in more than a hundred American cities. Houses were set on fire, businesses were looted, complete neighborhoods were destroyed, and black militants fought gun battles with police. Dozens were killed in the disturbances, thousands were injured and arrested.
The assassination was not without its sociopolitical contentions. On March 24, 1968, a page-one headline of the New York Times read “God is Dead”—a reference to the emergent theology of hope advocating active participation in human affairs in order to speed the coming of a better world. It is a tragic irony, then, that on the same day 40-year-old James Earl Ray—who a year earlier had escaped from the Missouri State Penitentiary in Jefferson City—arrived in Atlanta, Georgia, with plans to murder Martin Luther King either at his home or the Ebenezer Baptist Church where King was co-pastor. King, however, was peripatetic at the time, moving from a conference of Jewish labor leaders in New York City to a convention of the Rabbinical Assembly in the Catskill Mountains, to the National Cathedral in Washington, back to Atlanta, and then to Memphis where he was supporting a sanitation worker’s strike.

On March 30, Ray made the 160-mile drive from Atlanta to Birmingham, Alabama, where he purchased a Remington Gamemaster 30.6-caliber rifle with a magnification scope, and a twenty-round box of hollow point bullets, and then returned to Atlanta and checked into a rooming house. An avid newspaper reader, on April 1 Ray learned from an article in the Atlanta Constitution that King would return to Memphis on April 3 for a demonstration on Beale Street in support of reversing a legal injunction against the sanitation workers.

Ray changed plans and drove to Memphis where he checked into a hotel on April 2. King arrived in Memphis by plane the next day, but Ray did know where he was staying. That was easily resolved when Ray saw the local ten o’clock news telecast about the sanitation strike. The report said that King and his supporters were staying at the Lorraine Motel, 450 Mulberry Street, in the heart of Memphis.

At the Mason Temple on the evening of April 3, King delivered his “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop” speech in support of the sanitation workers. Heralded as one of the great speeches
of all time, King challenged America to live up to its ideals and discussed the possibilities of an untimely death. “I’m so happy tonight,” he concluded. “I’m not worried about anything. I’m not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the coming of the Lord!”

On the morning of April 4, Ray bought a copy of the *Memphis Commercial Appeal* featuring a page-one photograph of King standing in front of room 306 at the Lorraine Motel (Sides, 2010). Armed with this critical piece of intelligence, around 3 p.m. that afternoon Ray rented a room on the second floor of a rundown boarding house at 422 S. Main Street. The second-floor communal bathroom, on the back side of the building, sat 205 feet away from the Lorraine Motel, providing Ray with a direct line of sight to the balcony in front of room 306.

At approximately 5:55 p.m., King opened the door of room 306 and stepped onto the balcony, wearing a black suit over white shirt and tie, shoes freshly polished. He had no security and was completely vulnerable. Through Ray’s magnification scope, King appeared to be only 30 feet away. As King pulled a cigarette from his rumpled pack of Salems, a bullet tore away his jaw.

It was that simple. James Earl Ray stalked Martin Luther King through newspaper and television reports; the assassination was predicated entirely on media images. One escaped convict, one bullet, and African-American history was forever changed.

**Media and Terrorist Tactics**

Media and popular culture can also serve as a source for the terrorist’s campaigns, strategies and tactics. This was crucial to the terrorist campaign of Eric Rudolph. In terms of utter body count, Rudolph is the most prolific American lone wolf terrorist of all time. In four separate bombings, Rudolph mortally wounded three people and critically injured another 117. Once again, the story began in Atlanta.
The 1996 Summer Olympic Games started on July 19 with one of the most poignant moments in sports history: The lighting of the Olympics torch by Muhammad Ali. It took place a little more than one year after Timothy McVeigh killed 168 innocents with a massive ammonium-nitrate fertilizer bomb in Oklahoma City.\(^2\) Security at the Atlanta Olympics was therefore at a heightened state of readiness with some 30 thousand local, state, and federal agents and private security guards assigned to protect the games which were expected to draw a crowd of 85 thousand spectators each day. Tactical units, bomb technicians, rescue squads, and other specialists were on hand to provide around-the-clock security.

Yet shortly after midnight on July 27, 30-year-old Rudolph managed to slip past hundreds of security officers and enter the 21-acre Centennial Park adjacent to the Olympics Stadium. An estimated 50 thousand people were in Centennial Park, dancing at a free concert, drinking and visiting in the late summer night.

Rudolph was on warrior’s mission: He carried a heavy green military backpack containing a pipe bomb. He sat down on a park bench, placed the backpack under the bench, and walked away. Between 12:30 a.m. and 12:58 a.m., Rudolph placed two 911 calls to police warning that his bomb was about to explode, but those calls were ignored. Rudolph’s motive for the warning calls was anything but altruistic. By announcing his intent to bomb Centennial Park, Rudolph assumed that police would clear the area of citizens, leaving only police in direct proximity of the blast zone. Rudolph’s aim was to kill as many police officers as possible (Vollers, 2006).

In Centennial Park, the bomb’s timing device was ticking toward ignition inside the backpack. At 1:18 a.m., the timing device triggered the explosion, sending thousands of white

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\(^2\) McVeigh is not considered a lone wolf since more than one perpetrator was involved in the bombing (Hamm, 2002).
hot chunks of pipe and nails through the air and into the crowd, killing a woman and injuring 110 others, some grievously. A cameraman racing to the scene collapsed and died of a heart attack.

And Rudolph was free to maim and murder. Six months later, Rudolph set off a similar bomb outside an abortion clinic in the Atlanta suburb of Sandy Springs. An hour later, he detonated a second bomb next to a Dumpster, where he knew police and first responders would gather. In all, six were injured including two federal law enforcement agents. On February 21, 1997, Rudolph bombed a gay and lesbian nightclub in midtown Atlanta, yet no one was injured. Almost a year later, on January 28, 1998, Rudolph used a model airplane controller to detonate a bomb outside an abortion clinic in Birmingham, Alabama, killing an off-duty policeman and critically injuring a nurse.

Investigators had no doubt about the motive for these attacks. After the Olympics bombing, Rudolph sent letters to the media claiming credit in the name of the amorphous anti-abortion movement known as the Army of God, followed by what FBI agents called “the Waco code”—the numbers 4-1-9-9-3, referring to the date of the disastrous FBI raid on the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas (April 19, 1993), causing the deaths of 76 Davidians including a number of women and children. On April 19, 1995, McVeigh bombed the Oklahoma City Federal Building in revenge for the Waco raid two years earlier, to the very day, believing that orders to attack the Davidians were issued from the building. Among the books later found at Rudolph’s residence was the recently published “All-American Monster”: The Unauthorized Biography of Timothy McVeigh (Stickney, 1996). Within the American radical right, the selection of a calendar date as an ideological justification for violence is based on a scene in William Pierce’s influential 1978 novel The Turner Diaries, generally considered the bible of the far right. Two pages of the book were
found in McVeigh’s getaway car after the Oklahoma City bombing. In the novel, a fictitious group known as “The Order” (later adopted by the real terrorist group, the Order) declares a given date as the “Day of the Rope.” On that day, somebody from the news media must be hanged, preferably a Jew. Yet for McVeigh, the penultimate scene of the *Diaries* was a powerful visual image of the Order’s directions for constructing a bomb to be employed against FBI headquarters using “a little under 5,000 pounds of ammonium nitrate fertilizer. Sensitized with oil and tightly confined, it makes an effective blasting agent…able to punch through two levels of re-enforced concrete flooring while producing an open air blast wave powerful enough to blow the façade of a massive and strongly constructed building” (quoted in Hamm, 1997:179).

For paramilitary extremists angered by the Waco affair, April 19 became the Day of the Rope and bombing became the preferred terrorist tactic against state authority. Accordingly, McVeigh’s bombing in Oklahoma City and Rudolph’s Southern bombing campaign were apiece of the same movement connected by fringe-group popular culture.

Equally important, Rudolph also created a contagion effect by influencing what Barkun (1994) has termed the *white supremacist constellation*, denoting an interaction of various radical right movements with each other and with the wider culture. Through his bombing of the Olympic Games, and his press release referencing the Army of God and Waco, Eric Rudolph created a highly-publicized platform for protesting state-sanctioned abortion, excessive use of government force, and gun control—all deeply contentious issues at the time—thereby broadening his appeal among right-wingers with ideologies of varying extremes. That popular appeal would ultimately enable Rudolph to evade the FBI as a fugitive for more than five years while on the run in the vast Appalachian wilderness.
In October 1998, Rudolph was named as a suspect in the four Atlanta bombings and the FBI offered a $1 million reward for information leading to his capture. Federal, state, and local law enforcement search teams scoured the wilderness while locals turned Rudolph into a cultural icon. A mediocre country song was written about him, “Run, Rudolph Run.” His image appeared on a popular t-shirt, women admitted to having erotic dreams about the fugitive, and he became the subject of widespread Internet traffic. Among those influenced by the postings was David Copeland, one of Britain’s most prolific lone wolf terrorists who later confessed that he had been inspired by Rudolph’s attack on the Olympics (Spaaij, 2012). The age of the Internet “entrepreneur of violence” had begun.3

“Build a Bomb in the Kitchen of Your Mom”

Like nearly every other aspect of modern life, terrorist tactics have been profoundly influenced by the Internet. The Internet and social media make it possible for an individual to become radicalized in the solitude of his/her bedroom through linking and interacting with virtual “friends,” electronically exchanging militant propaganda and even acquiring technical know-how for committing acts of terrorism through online manuals. For jihadists of the post-9/11 era, no publication has been more vital than “Build a Bomb in the Kitchen of Your Mom.”

Published in 2010 as part of Issue No. 1 of Inspire, Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula’s online English-language magazine, “Build a Bomb in the Kitchen of Your Mom” has been linked to four bombing plots by domestic lone wolf terrorists in the United States since 2011 (Hamm and Spaaij, 2015). The article also served as a blueprint for the explosives made by the Tsarnaev brothers in the Boston Marathon bombing of 2013 (Geeson, 2015). In both syntax and

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3 Rudolph was arrested on May 31, 2003. In 2005, he was sentenced to four consecutive life terms and taken to the Federal Supermax at Florence, Colorado.
its hip-hop syncopation—Build a Bomb/ In the Kitchen of Your Mom—the article was intended for a youth market or an appeal to what Sageman (2008) calls “Jihadi cool.” Al-Qaeda is certainly aware of this appeal for in late 2014 Inspire published a how-to manual for bombing airplanes, specifically designed for the lone wolf terrorist. The Islamic State has also published a detailed “secret agent” training manual distributed on the Internet and designed to provide prospective ISIS supporters in Western nations with ways to disguise themselves and their motives when trying to plan and carry out lone wolf attacks. The following case illustrates the sociopolitical conditions that make a lone wolf susceptible to the visual imagery of these publications and how they are transformed into operational tactics for committing terrorism.

The Fort Hood Bombing Plot

When 21-year-old Naser Jason Abdo enlisted in the Army in 2009 he thought his service would not conflict with his newly adopted Muslim faith (Fernandez, 2011). A year later, Abdo’s unit was sent to Fort Campbell, Kentucky, where they were given deployment orders for Afghanistan. As the deployment date drew near, Abdo applied for conscientious objector status, writing in a letter that accompanied his application that he was not sure “whether going to war was the right thing to do Islamically.” The Army approved Abo’s discharge, but it was put on hold when officials discovered child pornography on Abdo’s government-issued laptop while processing him out. Officials recommended that Abdo be court-martialed, leading to his retaliation.

Abdo made plans to attack his own post, hoping to kill a high-ranking officer who had served in Afghanistan. But after learning that military police had visited gun stores where Abdo purchased weapons he planned to use in the attack, Abdo went AWOL from Fort Campbell on the 4th of July, 2011. He turned his attention to Fort Hood, Texas, the nation’s largest Army base,

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where two years earlier Major Nidal Hasan had committed a lone mass murder after receiving his deployment orders for Afghanistan.

On July 27, 2011, a clerk at the Guns Galore store in Killeen, Texas, noticed that Abdo was buying an unusually large amount of smokeless gun powder, along with three boxes of shotgun ammo and a magazine for a pistol. Abdo began asking questions of the clerk—a retired policeman—indicating that he was unfamiliar with some of the items. When Abdo asked, “What is smokeless powder?” the clerk became suspicious enough to notify the Killeen police who tracked Abdo to a hotel room at the Best Value Inn and Suites, two blocks from the Fort Hood Army base. In Abdo’s backpack, police found a .40-caliber semi-automatic handgun, more than a hundred rounds of ammunition, and bomb-making materials, including smokeless powder, shotgun shells and pellets, two clocks, two spools of wire, an electric drill and two pressure cookers. Next to it was the *Inspire* article “Build a Bomb in the Kitchen of Your Mom.”

After Abdo made a statement about “seeking retaliation” against the Army, police notified the FBI. Abdo told agents that he planned to assemble two bombs in the hotel room and detonate one of them at a restaurant frequented by Fort Hood soldiers, wait outside and shoot anyone who survived and become a martyr after police killed him. Abdo was arrested on July 28 for attempted use of a weapon of mass destruction.

Abdo’s political grievance against the war in Afghanistan was concealed within his personal grievances against Army officials and fellow soldiers. In reviewing Abdo’s conscientious objector application, his commanding officer wrote that Abdo’s problems with the military began in basic training where his rapport with peers was “horrible” and that he was harassed because of his Muslim faith. By the time Abdo reached Fort Campbell, he had developed “serious questions about his place in the Army.” Abdo’s father (who had also been
arrested on child pornography charges several years earlier) recalled that his son complained of being “treated badly” by fellow soldiers who mocked him as he prayed and “used bad language against Islam and its prophet.”

These experiences bled into one another, ultimately leading to the bombing plot through a series of triggering events. Abdo’s Afghanistan deployment triggered his application for conscientious objector status, which was approved. When the approval was overturned because of child pornography charges and he faced a court martial, it triggered Abdo’s plan to seek revenge. When Abdo learned that he could not attack his own base, it triggered his decision to go AWOL and search online for instructions on bomb building. This led him to download “Build a Bomb in the Kitchen of Your Mom” and his subsequent shopping spree at Guns Galore.

Undeniably, there was a copycat phenomenon at work. Being AWOL, Abdo had no legitimate reason to be at Fort Hood but he did have a reason for targeting the base. Upon leaving a court hearing the day after his arrest, Abdo shouted to no one in particular: “Nidal Hasan—Fort Hood 2009!” in reference to Hasan’s carnage at Fort Hood in 2009. Coincidently, or not, Guns Galore was the same store where Hasan had purchased a semi-automatic firearm used in the Fort Hood shooting.5

The Seattle Massacre

Although the Internet is an important venue for communicating terrorist tactics, it is not the only venue. Such was the case for Naveed Haq, a Pakistani-American from Seattle, Washington.6 In

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5 On August 10, 2012, Abdo was sentenced to life in federal prison and taken to the Colorado Supermax where he was secured on “bombers row” alongside Eric Rudolph and Unabomber Theodore Kaczynski.

6 The narrative is compiled from Felt and Kiley (2006) and various news reports.
1996, 20-year-old Haq was diagnosed with bi-polar disorder and placed on powerful psychiatric medications, including lithium and Depakote. Even though he went on to earn a college degree in electrical engineering, Haq was incapable of holding down a job and spent most of his time sleeping and flirting with girls on the Internet. Haq had few friends and no steady relationships until he entered into an arranged marriage on a trip to Pakistan in 2001. Yet Haq didn’t like the woman because she was overweight and Haq returned home alone where he disavowed Islam and converted to Christianity thinking that church would be a better place to meet women.

In March 2006, Haq, now 30, was arrested at a Seattle-area mall for lewd conduct after standing on a fountain near a Macy’s department store and harassing young girls at a nearby cosmetics counter. When a teenage girl walked by his perch, Haq unzipped his pants and flashed his penis at her. When an officer asked Haq why he had exposed himself to the girl, he replied, “It’s hard to meet women.” Haq’s lewd-conduct arrest deeply embarrassed his family. It came at the bloodiest point of the Iraq war which Haq followed in the news and in response he began making anti-Semitic remarks to his roommate.

Sometime in June, 2006, Haq and his roommate went to the movies and saw United 93, Hollywood’s version of the plane crash in Shankesville, Pennsylvania, on 9/11. Of particular interest to Haq was a scene in the movie where a terrorist grabs a stewardess, places a knife at her throat, and forces his way into the cockpit. “The movie mesmerized him,” recalled the roommate.

On July 12, Israeli Defense Forces began a 34-day aerial bombardment of Lebanon, hammering Hezbollah strongholds and civilian infrastructure with cluster bombs. Televised images of the bombing showed neighborhoods in ruin, civilians killed and wounded. Haq watched it all but felt that the media was downplaying the extent of Israeli atrocities.
On July 21, Haq went to two different gun stores and bought two semi-automatic firearms—a Smith & Wesson .45-caliber revolver and another .40-caliber handgun. Though legally barred from purchasing firearms because of his mental illness, Haq was able to buy these guns by simply lying on a questionnaire. He paid for the weapons by selling food stamps and was informed that he could pick up his guns after the mandatory five-day waiting period.

A turning point for Haq occurred on July 27, the day that he was scheduled to appear in court on the lewd-conduct charge. Haq was indignant about the charge and denied doing it, claiming that he had only been urinating in the fountain mall when the girl walked by. Hoping to be cleared of wrongdoing and vindicated in the eyes of his family, as Haq was preparing for the hearing that morning, his lawyer called and told Haq that the hearing was postponed.

That was the triggering event for Haq. Being denied his day in court was a tragic disappointment for Haq and a personal injustice. As fate would have it, the waiting period for Haq’s purchase of two high-velocity firearms expired the same day, July 27, allowing him to pick up his weapons from the gun stores, along with several boxes of ammunition. Haq then went searching on his laptop for people to kill. The political novice that he was, Haq began by Googling the words “something Jewish.” What came back was the Jewish Federation of Greater Seattle, established in 1928 to serve the religious and cultural needs of the city’s Jewish community. Their website showed that most staff members were women. The next day, Naveed Haq became a lone wolf terrorist of the most vicious kind.

Around 4 p.m., July 28, Haq entered the lobby of the Jewish Federation building and hid behind a potted plant until he spotted a 14-year-old girl walking alone through the lobby. Imitating the scene in *United 93*, Haq completed a feedback loop by grabbing the girl and putting a gun to her back. Then he forced the girl to use the intercom so they could to be buzzed into the
Federation’s offices on the second floor. Upon entering the offices, Haq asked the receptionist about speaking with a manager, as the girl walked to the bathroom and locked herself inside. An employee picked up the phone to dial 911, but before she could, Haq shot her in the knee.

“I’m a Muslim-American,” shouted Haq, “I’m angry at Israel!” And then the carnage began. Haq walked down the hallway, shooting into office after office as he passed by. Haq shot three women in the abdomen. He shot a 58-year-old woman in the chest, and then once in the head, killing her. Other women jumped out the second-story windows. A woman who was five months pregnant, walked to her office door and Haq shot her in the abdomen but the bullet hit her raised arm. Lying on the floor and bleeding, she dialed 911 on her cellphone as Haq yelled; “Now you’re the hostage and I don’t give a fuck if I kill you or your baby!” Haq said he was a Muslim and the shooting was his personal statement against Jews and the Bush administration for starting the Iraq war, adding that he was doing this to get Jews out of Lebanon. Haq demanded to speak with CNN. He was handed the cellphone and told the police operator, “These are Jews and I’m tired of getting pushed around and our people getting pushed around by the situation in the Middle East.” Haq further demanded that the United States immediately withdraw its military forces from Iraq.

Minutes later, Haq simply quit and told the operator he would surrender to police. Haq walked out of the building with his hands on his head at 4:15 p.m.

Five of the women were taken to a hospital, where three were listed in critical condition. One had a bullet lodged in her spine and would never walk again.7

Media and Violent Ideology

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7 On January 13, 2010, Haq was sentenced to life in prison.
Analyzing the ways that lone wolves adopt their violent ideologies reveals an astonishing evolution. Prior to 9/11, most lone wolf terrorists were radicalized through either an extremist group that they once belonged to but had since abandoned, or through their families. Post (2007) argues that ideology is often transmitted from generation to generation, and that traditions of violent radicalization are passed on in this manner. But that does not explain lone wolf terrorists of the 21st century. For them, traditional means of radicalization through families and kinship groups have been replaced by informal social networks found on the Internet. Post also makes the point that there are real psychological differences between those terrorists who carry on the work of their parents, and those who are trying to destroy the world of their parents. A range of European revolutionary groups have set foot on this pathway by completely rejecting their past, leading one scholar to describe them as “children without fathers” (Richardson, 2006). That may partially explain the process of radicalization for today’s lone wolf terrorists—they have become children without families. We conclude with such a case.

*The Federal Reserve Bombing Plot*

Quazi Nafis (pronounced Na-fis) is not known for the terrorism he committed, but for the terrorism he planned. The FBI’s ultimate nightmare, Nafis was the first would-be suicide bomber in American history. In addition to open sources, the following narrative is based personal correspondence and a two-day interview with Nafis at the Federal Prison Camp in Edgefield, South Carolina, where he is serving a 30-year sentence on terrorism charges.

Nafis was a 20-year-old student from Bangladesh when he arrived at New York’s JFK International Airport on January 13, 2012. Loretta Lynch, the New York federal attorney who would later prosecute Nafis (and go on to replace Eric Holder as U.S. Attorney General) argued that Nafis came to the United States not to further his studies but to advance the goals of jihad.
Describing Nafis as one of the most dangerous terrorists the U.S. has faced since 9/11, Lynch told reporters that “He came here wanting to carry out a terrorist attack.”\(^8\) If that were the case, then Nafis would have stayed in New York when he arrived there on January 13 and begun his surveillance of a high-value target. Instead, Nafis boarded a connecting flight to Cape Girardeau, Missouri, and began his classes at Southeast Missouri State University (SEMO).

Nafis had a relatively stable life at SEMO. He joined the local Islamic Center and took courses in computer science, math and physics. “I made some good friends at SEMO,” said Nafis.\(^9\) He did volunteer advising for Muslim students and was elected vice president of the Muslim Student Association. Nafis did charity work for the Islamic Center, going door to door on Friday evenings with baskets of donated food for the poor. A classmate would say that “Nafis was a good kid. He showed no traces of anti-Americanism or death to America, or anything like that. He was a trustworthy and honest kid” (Long, 2012). Another student, a 54-year-old Iraq war vet who used to give Nafis a lift home after classes, would say “We talked quite a bit...And this [terrorism charge] doesn’t seem to be in character.”\(^10\) There is, then, little evidence indicating that Nafis came to the U.S. bent on committing jihadi terrorism.

The downfall of Quazi Nafis was likely due to a learning difficulty associated with attention deficit disorder. As the semester at SEMO went on, Nafis became buried under a mountain of homework and did not perform up to expectations due to a continuing inability to concentrate. “For some reason I cannot concentrate properly,” recalled Nafis. “I just gaze at the book but not being able to memorize something I am trying to get by heart.”\(^11\) As a result, Nafis was suspended from SEMO for poor grades.

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\(^9\) Hamm interview with Nafis, Aug. 4, 2015.
\(^11\) Nafis letter to Hamm.
In early June of 2012, Nafis moved to Albany, New York, where he was taken in by an uncle who helped him find employment as a construction worker. But the work was sporadic and Nafis became isolated in his uncle’s apartment. Albany was the beginning of a downward spiral for Nafis. He had no friends, little money and rarely left his bedroom. Battling depression, Nafis fell into the habit of sleeping well into the afternoon, praying and then tethering himself to his laptop, surfing the Internet and making Facebook postings until the sun came up. Over and over, day after day, he would do this. In early July, Nafis’s aunt complained about her nephew’s behavior and Nafis was asked to leave the apartment. But before he did, a new “friend” appeared on his Facebook page. When he sent Nafis a gruesome video of Muslims being slaughtered by Bashar al-Assad’s barrel bombs in Syria, Nafis experienced a turning point leading to his interest in retaliatory terrorism. “That video is what changed me,” he said.12

Nafis located to a Bangladeshi community in Jamaica, Queens, New York, and moved in with four others at the apartment of a distant cousin. He found a job in a Manhattan pizza joint but quit because they served pork. Ever the pious Muslim, Nafis got jobs in a pet store and with a construction company, but quit them both because he refused to work on Friday. He also enrolled in classes at a business college in midtown Manhattan, but that didn’t last long because of his concentration problems. “I started to feel like someone who was physically and mentally disabled to be successful,” Nafis later wrote to his sentencing judge. “It is just like I could not cope up with the fast competitive world. I was falling into deep depression.”13 His life in Jamaica was fraught with problems. He had problems with the people he lived with, employment problems, problems with his student visa, concentration problems and depression problems. On

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12 Hamm interview with Nafis, Aug. 5, 2015.
top of that, Nafis learned that his girlfriend back in Bangladesh was cheating on him. That was the final straw. “I became overwhelmed,” he said. “I became hopeless.”

Enter the life after death sermons of senior al-Qaeda recruiter and motivator Anwar al-Awlaki (1971-2011). In this massive, 22-CD set of online lectures entitled *The Hereafter*, al-Awlaki describes the process human souls must travel through to reach either eternal life in Paradise or Hell. God’s judgement depends on the soul’s accountability to the requirements of the Quran. Those who pass the accountability test will be rewarded with Paradise. Nafis became obsessed with this theory. “Al-Awlaki put everything in a practical aspect,” said Nafis. By spending countless nights alone watching al-Awlaki’s online sermons about the hereafter, Nafis was given a sense of certainty about his own death. “That way, I justified my killing myself with a jihadist act,” he explained. Nafis can be added to the growing roster of young jihadists around the world who have been enabled by the online sermons of Anwar al-Awlaki.

By August, Nafis had become the subject of an FBI sting operation to remove him from the streets, but it was unclear what kind of terrorism Nafis was planning for. That was resolved on August 4 when Nafis unexpectedly confided in an undercover agent that he wanted to perform a suicide bombing at the Federal Reserve Bank in New York’s financial district. There is no doubt that Nafis was emotionally ready to become an al-Qaeda suicide bomber. On August 11, Nafis told the agent that he wanted to strap on a suicide vest and pull its ripcord inside the Federal Reserve.

Nafis gets the last word here. “After being arrested, I had a lot of time [to] study about Islam. I read the whole Quran which I did not read before being in prison. The more I read the

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14 Hamm interview with Nafis, Aug. 5, 2015.
16 Nafis letter to Judge Amon.
17 *USA vs. Quazi Mohammed Rezwanul Ahsan Nafis*, Criminal Complaint (undated).
more I realized I was blindly following those radical people and the lecturer [al-Awlaki] I was listening to. I did not find a single verse to support my actions in the Noble Quran…If the [FBI] agents had not found me I do not know what would have happened. I thank America for saving me from utter destruction.”

**Conclusion: Toward a Visual Criminology of Terrorism**

Previous research ignores the ways in which media and popular culture determine how terrorists select their targets for killing, design their deadly tactics, and adopt their violent ideologies in the first place. Yet the cases explored in this chapter show that the study of visual imagery holds great promise for terrorism research, beginning with the crucial phenomenon of feedback looping. Cultural criminologist Jeff Ferrell has aptly identified the broader implications at work here: “A world in which images of crime and justice pervade everyday life, looping and spiraling through newscasts and conversations, spawning public fear and public policy is not a world that can be reduced to one of four survey answer options or to dry prose and numbers. Understanding this world requires researching it on its own terms, on the terms of representational dynamics, symbolic discourse and stylistic ambiguity” (Ferrell et al., 2015: 210).

Indeed, terrorism research requires methods especially attuned to visual imagery—not only for improving our understanding of target selection, tactics and ideology—but because image production lies at the very heart of terrorist recruitment today. Consider the sophisticated media campaign of ISIS, a terrorist organization some 70-thousand strong in its Syria and Iraq holdings with legions of multilingual Internet fan boys and fan girls around the world. Google lists an astounding 6 million postings and video clips of ISIS beheadings alone, some

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**Note:** Nafis letter to Judge Amon.
unimaginably graphic, which can be downloaded by anyone with a cellphone, meaning nearly everyone. The beheading videos are primarily intended to serve as a recruiting tool for Western youth by projecting ISIS’s courage and power through “jihadi cool.” From a Syrian battlefield in August of 2014, for instance, Abdel Bary, a 23-year-old London rapper, uploaded to Twitter a picture of himself holding up a severed head. The caption read: “Chillin’ with my homie or what’s left of him.”

This gruesome image cannot be comprehended much less explained with traditional social science research methods. Positivistic criminology, in particular, lacks the language and intellectual framework for describing what Ferrell calls the *creative tension* between objectivity and subjectivity, between a person’s immersion in the image and the stark immediacy of its meaning. What is needed to understand the beheading image is a method to grasp the complex subjectivities between executioner, victim and spectator (see also Brown, 2007; Carrabine, 2012; Hamm, 2007). This requires the incorporation of a new set of visual research methods into terrorism studies that draws from the wide-ranging work of cultural criminologists, critical theorists, literary writers, religious scholars, cultural anthropologists, documentary film makers, political scientists and even economists. Collectively, their work could unpack the tension between visual introspection and politically charged analysis, leading to greater insights into issues of justice and injustice (Ferrell et al., 2015). This may become the foundation for a visual criminology of terrorism, one that ultimately allows for a deeper engagement with the sheer politics of cruelty that is the project of all terrorism.
References


The internet and social media allow terrorists unprecedented ways to network globally and the ability to propagate their ideologies right up to livestreaming their attacks on Facebook, as was the case with the Christchurch attack. Most experts agree that terrorists are products of their time: An increase in intolerance has established itself in recent years as a global social trend, fueled by political discourse that is becoming increasingly populist.

Read more: Lone wolf terrorists are security officials' worst nightmare. The 'blood and soil' ideology. Australian Senator Fraser Anning released an official statement immediately following the Christchurch terrorist attack: "Let us be clear, while Muslims may have been the victims today, usually they are the perpetrators."

Uncontrolled Keywords: media coverage; terrorist campaigns; terrorist events; contagion effect. Subjects: Current > FOR Classification > 1602 Criminology Current > Division/Research > College of Sports and Exercise Science. Depositing User: Symplectic Elements. Date Deposited: 31 Aug 2018 03:56.

The image of the lone wolf who splits from the pack has been a staple of popular culture since the 19th century, cropping up in stories about empire and exploration from British India to the wild west. From 1914 onwards, the term was popularised by a bestselling series of crime novels and films centred upon a criminal-turned-good-guy nicknamed Lone Wolf.

The modern concept of lone-wolf terrorism was developed by rightwing extremists in the US. In 1983, at a time when far-right organisations were coming under immense pressure from the FBI, a white nationalist named Louis Beam published a manifesto that called for ‘leaderless resistance’ to the US government.

Once again, the two attackers were dubbed lone wolves by officials and the media.