



Lone Wolves as a Threat to Aviation Security: Typology, Tactics, Development Prospects

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Abstract

This paper discusses the threats related to the development of the phenomenon known as lone wolf violence. Its main goal is to analyze lone wolves' activities, particularly their tactics in carrying out actions that pose a threat to aviation safety. The primary method used for the main argument of the paper, interdisciplinary modeling of the determinants of violence, allows for formulating forecasts on the development of lone wolves phenomenon in the most important context for those predictions, i.e., changeability of used means. This inventiveness comes down to disorganized forms of functioning (leaderless resistance) and the methods used in fighting, both of which stem from considerable power disproportions between lone wolves (terrorists) and states. The development of violence among lone wolves is analyzed from the perspective of this constantly changing tactical and technological means. This paper is of both explanatory and prognostic nature. It consists of five parts. The first is dedicated to providing theoretical background and depicting case studies that serve as a starting point for the following analyses. The second section is dedicated to a brief description of used methods. Next, the types of lone wolves' activities are characterized and examined. In section four, the current and potential tactics employed by terrorists are analyzed. This paper concludes with the author's prognosis regarding the future development of this phenomenon.

Keywords

aviation security, leaderless resistance, lone wolf violence, single issue terrorism

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1. Introduction and historical background

The aim of this article is to analyze the phenomenon referred to as "lone wolf violence" in the aspect of threats to air safety. This form of violence has always been a hazard, despite the fact that its real dimension (measured by the number of victims) can be described as very modest. Of course, there are arguments over data, which are not always properly collected and interpreted. However, the data is not the only indicator of risk. It should be remembered that the strength of the impact of terrorism (in particular lone wolf terrorism) is measured not only by the number of attacks and their greater or lesser lethality, but by the fear-based media interaction – a human reaction that translates into specific social behaviors (usually expected by terrorists) (Gill, 2015). The popularity of the lone wolf ideology was also contributed to by the far-right theorists (supremacists, anti-abortionists and supporters of racial divisions), such as: Joseph Tommasi, Luis Beam, William Luther Pierce, Tom Metzger and Alex Curtis (Kaplan, 1997), as well as many attacks on public institutions and large corporations.

Lone actors also do not shy away from the so-called air terrorism. An example of this can be the attack of the probably most famous lone actor, namely Theodore Kaczynski. The attack he carried out was the third in his terrorist career. It took place on November 15, 1979. The subject of the attack was an American Airlines passenger plane, and the tool was an explosive placed in an air shipment that Kaczynski sent from Chicago to Washington. The explosive charge with an installed altimeter exploded in a shipping container when the plane reached an altitude of 2,000 feet. As a result of the explosion, the pressure inside the aircraft dropped and the cabin filled with smoke. None of the passengers were badly hurt (only 12 people were hospitalized due to smoke inhalation), but the plane had to make an emergency landing. After this incident, the FBI nicknamed him Unabomber (based on the words "UNiversity", "Airlines", and BOMBings), and Kaczynski noted: "In some of my notes I have mentioned revenge against society. I planned to blow up a plane during flight. Unfortunately, the plane was not destroyed, the bomb was too weak" (Chase, 2003, p. 52). The Unabomber's motivation was based on the belief that the technological advances we are constantly experiencing have a negative impact on human life, which has become barren, apathetic, devoid of fulfillment and dignity. Continuing the technological progress will only worsen this situation, because "it will further humiliate man and will expose the natural world to greater degradation, possibly leading to further social destabilization and psychological suffering" (Kaczynski, 2003, p. 29). Man can return to the world of freedom. However, to do so, the technological system must be destroyed and be turned to what is counter-ideal for this system, namely wildlife.

Another interesting case of a lone actor conducting attacks on airlines was Muharem Kurbegović, born in 1943, also known as The Alphabet Bomber. This lonely Yugoslav engineer (working in the aviation industry) emigrated to the USA in 1967, where he planted an 11-pound bomb at the Pan American World Airways terminal at the Los Angeles International Airport on August 6, 1974. As a result of the explosion, three people died and eight were injured. Most likely, he was motivated by accusations of masturbating in the dance hall. Although found not guilty, the arrest made him unable to apply for the US citizenship. This led to frustration that turned into a personal vengeance against the judge and commissioners. There was also an ideological motivation. This was a demand for changes to immigration and naturalization laws in the United States, as well as lifting all restrictions relating to sex-

ual activity. He also called for the rejection of all forms of racism, nationalism, fascism, communism, or religion. He particularly condemned the United States Supreme Court for the criminal nature of his actions. His declared aim was also to "undermine the foundations of the Western civilization, which is the Scriptures". Although Kurbegovich did not belong to any organization and he did not have any external support, he claimed to be Isak Rasim, the military commander of the group ("Chief Military Officer of Aliens of America") he called Aliens of America. Two years after his arrest, police found 25 pounds of potassium cyanide and nitric acid in his apartment.

Is the activity of lone actor terrorists a real security threat? The figures on the number of attacks are not particularly frightening. The data collected between 1968 and 2010 in the 15 surveyed countries recorded only 88 lone actors who carried out 198 attacks - out of 11,235 attacks recorded in the Global Terrorism Database (Global Terrorism Database, 2021). These countries include the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Spain, Italy, Poland, Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Czech Republic, Portugal, Russia, Australia, Canada and the United States. As Ramon Spaaij wrote, this number of attacks represents only 1.8 percent of all attacks carried out in those years, indicating that lone actor attacks are rather marginal (Spaaij, 2012). The lethality of lone actor attacks is also not very impressive. A lone actor has an average death toll of 0.62 per incident. This number is even less impressive if it is compared with all the terrorist attacks in these 15 countries – the death rate in these 15 countries is 1.6 (Spaaij, 2012, p. 27). When it comes to ideological motivation, Spaaij assesses it as unknown in over 30% of cases. The remaining ones can be described as extreme-right – 17%, jihadist – 15%, anti-abortion – 8%, nationalist-separatist – 7% (Spaaij, 2012, pp. 29-31). According to Petter Nesser, those presented by Spaaij do not reflect the gravity of the threats, as the data covers only successful attacks. In fact, there are many more. And so, according to him, in Europe alone in the years 1995 – 2012, as many as 14% of all attack plots were prepared by lone actors (Nesser, 2012).

However, the impact of terrorism is measured not only by the number of attacks and their greater or lesser lethality, but by the fear-based interaction through the media – human fear that translates into specific social behaviors (usually expected by terrorists). The act behind which there is an organized group has a different "emotional rank" for the society than the act of a lone wolf. It probably happens as a result of the subconscious assumption that a group, as an entity composed of individuals with comparatively different personalities and with varying interests (despite strong ideological unification), is something rational to some extent, at least it is an environment where a certain, though sometimes an unstable "balance of interests" is worked out, which in turn must lead to toning down in terms of activities and goals. On the other hand, an individual (in the opinion of the potential addressees of a terrorist act) is a closed world. If they act on their own, without any hints and suggestions from other terrorists, they are influenced only by their own impulses. Since they are not subject to external orders and restrictions (resulting from the intersection of the interests of other members of the ideological community), and if they are not countered by other internal impulses (e.g. fear of the consequences of the act), their terrorist activity may take an extremely radical form. Such fears seem to have some justification in the mental reality of a lone actor.

2. Research methodology, research tools and procedures

The basis of the entire research process will be analysis and synthesis. Original source texts and all types of publications will be analyzed. The purpose of this analysis in relation

to the source texts is to extract the truth about a given document and to conclude on its basis and on the basis of the previously acquired knowledge what really happened and what phenomena accompanied the event. The use of synthesis is intended to go beyond the simple merging of the reconstructed fragments of the phenomenon studied in the research process in order to create a complete picture.

The radicalism of lone wolves is an extremely complex phenomenon and therefore the research perspectives cannot be homogeneous, but must complement and interpenetrate each other. For example, it is impossible to understand and thus properly grasp the political aspects of their activities without a thorough analysis of the ideological foundations of their activities, which in turn requires a closer look at the social and political changes. On the sociological level, the methods of media studies have been applied. All available source materials, as well as scientific studies (presented from an axiologically neutral point of view) were collected, ordered, categorized and criticized. At the political science level (especially with regard to organizational structures and action strategies), a decisive role is played by comparative analysis, concerning both classic hierarchical organizations (comparing individual organizations and their types) and new types of organizations (based on the idea of network warfare and leaderless resistance).

3. Types of activities

Lone wolves are not monolithic, neither ideologically nor strategically. Although definitions are always of foundationalist nature, their shape is undoubtedly connected to some extent with the social habit of classifying items into a given group or groups. In the methodology of sciences, a practice of this kind is referred to as an empirical generalization. The researchers of the phenomenon of lone wolves do not deviate from this pattern, distinguishing several different types of these.

Thus, Raffaello Pantucci distinguishes three categories in his typology: loner, lone wolf, and lone wolf pack (Pantucci, 2011). "Loner" is an individual who carries out terrorist attacks without having virtual or real connections with other extremists. However, they can draw inspiration from foreign sources for their deeds. According to Pantucci, there are few individuals that fit into this standard. These exceptions include, for example, Roshonara Choundhry, who, apart from the passive "consumption of materials" on the Internet (these were mainly lectures by the radical Islamic clergyman, the leader of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, Anwar al-Awlaki) most likely had no contact with other extremists. According to Pantucci, a "lone wolf" is someone who, while committing terrorist acts without anyone's command, maintains certain contact with other extremists. The contact may be carried out both online and in person. An example of such a lone wolf is Nidal Malik Hasan, who, a year before the attack on Fort Hood, Texas, contacted the aforementioned Anwar al-Awlaki by e-mail. In January 2009, al-Awlaki published an essay entitled *44 Ways to Support Jihad*, which is a collection of tips for the proponents of the jihad movement. Contrary to the name "lone wolf", Raffaello Pantucci suggests it is also to attribute the activity of lone wolves not only to individuals, but also to isolated couples and even groups. In his typology, in addition to the category of the loner or the lonely wolf, he also distinguishes a group of lone wolves, defined as an autonomous unit that, acting on its own and using extremist ideology as its justification, tries to commit terrorist acts. Such a group, as Pantucci puts it, "may or may not have ties with acting terrorists, but presents a lack of subordination in terms of control and orders", and "just like lone actors it activates itself and sets tasks" (Pantucci, 2011, p. 19). An example of such a group can be the brothers Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev.

A different categorization is given by Jeffrey D. Simon in his book *Lone Wolf Terrorism. Understanding the Growing Threats*. Taking into account the criterion of the source and nature of the motivation, he distinguished five categories of lone wolves. These are secular lone wolf, religious lone wolf, single-issue lone wolf, criminal lone wolf, and idiosyncratic lone wolf. I will try to briefly characterize these categories (Simon, 2013). A secular lone wolf is an individual who carries out violent attacks, driven by political, ethnic-nationalist or separatist motivations. This category includes Simon Timothy McVeigh and Andreas Breivik. The second type is a religious lone wolf. They perform acts motivated by a specific religious doctrine – whether it be Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism or any other metaphysically rooted philosophy of life. Simon also includes American white supremacists or neo-Nazis in this group, because many of them are supporters of the Christian Identity Movement (or are inspired by this religious view of the world), whose anti-Semitic and racist ideology justifies their violence. This category includes: Nidal Malik Hasan and James von Brunn. The third type is "single-issue lone wolf". They do not pursue broad socio-political changes, but rather deal with certain specific matters. Simon lists radical anti-abortionists, animal defenders, and environmentalists within this type of lone wolf. Eric Rudolf and Volkert van der Graaf are representatives of this category. Another type of lone wolves Simon identifies as "criminal". This type of lone wolf is mainly motivated by the desire of profit. According to Jeffrey Simon, John Gilbert Graham and Panos Koupparis are the representatives of this category. The fifth and the last type of lone wolves – in Simon's nomenclature called "idiosyncratic" wolves, motivated primarily by their own mental problems. Their very expression is irrational. Usually they are diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia. According to Simon, Theodore Kaczynski and Muharem Kurbegovic belong to this category.

Another classification is presented by Khaled A. Beydoun in the article *Lone Wolf Terrorism: Types, Stripes, and Double Standards*, in which he distinguishes: lone soldiers, lone vanguards, loners, lone followers, and lone killers (Beydoun, 2018). "Lone soldiers" are those who formally belong to a given terrorist organization, accept their ideology, but commit violent acts on their own, albeit with the consent and support of this organization. A typical representative of this category would be Mark Stroman, who in 2001 killed three men (who he considered Muslims) in Dallas, Texas in retaliation for the September 9, 2001 attack. Stroman was closely associated with the Aryan Brotherhood and carried out the assassination with the approval and support of that organization. Another example of a lone soldier given by Beydoun is Syed Rizwan Farook who, together with his wife Tashfeen Malik, shot 14 people and injured another 21. "Lone vanguards" are people who willfully decide to act independently. They can, of course, be externally inspired in terms of ideology to some extent (stimulated by various currents of thought), but the entire ideological message that is the source of violent actions is their own original creation. This category includes Andreas Breivik who, although loosely inspired by various supremacist and nativist groups, based his actions on his own ideological construct. "Loners", just like "lone vanguards", operate independently and under the influence of their own ideology, which is more or less their own ideological construct. Unlike the latter, however, their solitary action is not a conscious choice, but results from social rejection. According to Khaled Beydoun, Theodore Kaczynski (Unabomber) is an example of a "loner", whose terrorist activity for Beydoun was the result of social alienation, and not a consequence of a chosen strategy or ideology. "Lone followers" are those who wish to act as members of a given grouping, but due to their lack of competence, cannot formally become a part of it. However, they fit into the ideological profile of a given grouping, hoping that they will become its rank and file members. One of the lone followers is Dylan Roof, who, motivated by racist ideology, killed 9 African Americans in 2015. As Beydoun suggests, the perpetrator's manifesto shows the ideological influences of the radical organization called Council of Conservative Citizens, which he did not aspire to "due to lack of competence". "Lone killers" is the last of the proposed categories. According

to Beydoun this group includes killers (usually mass killers) who have not been recognized by law enforcement as terrorists. It is also difficult to attribute greed as the main motive for their criminal activity. Beydoun does not provide examples to illustrate this type of lone wolves, but he would most likely be inclined to include those who have committed the so-called hate crimes, such as the perpetrators of school massacres.

Of course, the basis of any definition is the terminological decision of the author who defines the term in the way they deem valid. However, in my opinion, too much conceptual blur, which occurs when a phenomenon is defined too broadly, is bad for scientific pragmatics. Such imprecision prevents us from distinguishing the specific features of the phenomenon in question, and, consequently, to efficiently use the given term. I mean, for example, Pantucci's typology, which extended the category of lone wolves to include groups as well, which in my opinion leads to a lot of confusion, especially if we allow, as Pantucci himself does, that these groups may have had "ties to acting terrorists". The only restriction made by Pantucci is that there should be no "subordination in terms of control and orders" between lone wolves (a group of lone wolves) and some organization, which is not a particularly significant restriction here, as the concept of "organization" today does not mean a hierarchical structure, but a decentralized movement. There is also no reason why this "group of lone wolves" should not be treated simply as a small organization.

Jeffrey Simon's typology also raises methodological doubts in my opinion. I mean the "idiosyncratic" type, which, according to him, is primarily motivated by one's "own mental problems". To my mind, there is no practical application for this category, because it is impossible to simply determine the exact motivation of each perpetrator. Simon himself does not make it easier, including Andreas Breivik in the secular lone wolf category, and categorizing Theodore Kaczynski as an idiosyncratic lone wolf. Against this background, distinguishing the category of criminal lone wolves seems slightly more understandable (the source of motivation in this case is easier to verify), but it is not known whether this category can be considered cognitively interesting. If we consider the desire to obtain material goods as the source of terrorists' motivation, we should consider each criminal working on their own as a lone wolf. I am not sure whether this is the conclusion the researcher aimed to reach.

I have considerable doubts about Khaled Beydoun's typology, in particular with regard to the "lone soldiers" he has distinguished, who supposedly formally belong to a given terrorist organization and accept their ideology, but carry out violent acts on their own, albeit with the consent and support of the organization. Here, in my opinion, the "conceptual blur" is evident. It is not entirely clear to me why these individuals should not be considered members of the organization. It is also not known how, in accordance with this typology, the verification of "independence" in the field of activities can be carried out. In short, in this case excessive "conceptual subtlety" leads to conceptual blur.

4. Tactics

Lone actors' activity is usually viewed as the progressive stage (and sometimes even the highest stage) of leaderless resistance. It is a tactic, the basis of which is to give up all (especially hierarchical) organizational structures and replace them with a decentralized structure, based on a common ideology and common goals that result from it.

The sources of the lone wolf concept can be found, as specified before, in the concept of "leaderless resistance", whose foundations can be found in the ideas of two political activists – the founder of the International Service of Information, Colonel Ulius Louis Amoss and

the radical activist of the American Right, Louis Beam. This strategy assumes abandoning any hierarchical organizational structures that would be replaced by a loose configuration of small, autonomous cells that are not managed by any central unit. These cells act independently, following their own tactics and strategy, not agreed with other individuals or groups (Posluszna & Mares, 2016).

Leaderless resistance has many advantages. First of all, organizations based on this model are actually not exposed to police surveillance at all. In a pyramidal structure, a potential agent, even if they manage to penetrate to a certain level of the hierarchical pyramid, they can easily destroy all levels below their own level, as well as threaten the levels above. The danger of infiltration is much smaller for "organizations" in which individual actors or small groups not only do not have any organizational hub, but also operate without any structural connection with each other. In organizations of this type, the basic unifying element becomes the ideology from which members of the movement will learn about the appropriate methods of fighting. This ideology has had its vital source since the beginning of the 1990's. This source is the Internet.

On the Internet, network connections can take many different shapes (Arquilla & Ronfeldt, 2001). They can take the form of chains ("chain network", "line network"). In such a case, the communication between individual links (information exchange) will run along the lines of links connected only by neighboring elements. Another type is a nodal network ("star network", "hub network", "wheel network"). Here, the communication between centers and the coordination of activities depends on the central element, which is an intermediary node that acts as a transmitter of information and goods. Another type of network is the omnichannel network ("all-channel network", "full-matrix network"). In an omnichannel network, all centers are connected with each other. There are no distinguished nodes and the communication between the selected elements in the network can take place independently from any other connection.

Regardless of the kind of the intra-organizational operation model of we consider, whether it is the one based on the model of "leaderless resistance" or the one based on the model of the omnichannel network, the problem of internal communication between all activists of the movement deserves attention in this context. Here, the central place (though probably not the only one) is occupied by websites. These sites are in fact intermediary nodes in the exchange of information, and at the same time centers of ideological influence. Activists operating under the banner of the given organization provide information about their activity by means of anonymous, often encrypted messages, which are then placed on websites. These websites also provide detailed instructions on security rules and data encrypting methods. A particularly rich set of tips can be found on the ELF website (The Nord American Earth Liberation Front Press Office, 2009). The website owners usually deny that they have anything to do with leading or encouraging direct action, claiming that they are merely advocating freedom of expression, freedom of information, and the public good (No Compromise, 2009).

5. Conclusion

Will the future bring a dynamic development of the activity of "lone wolves"? It seems that such a scenario is highly probable for at least two reasons. The first is the emergence (and continuous development) of new information and communication technologies allowing for relatively unrestricted and to a large extent anonymous information exchange. The Internet, of course, plays a special role among these technologies. As Southern Poverty Law

Center analyst Mark Potok correctly points out, “The Internet is an important part of a leaderless resistance strategy. It allows lone wolves to obtain up-to-date information on events, to follow changes in ideology, and to discuss tactics – all this influences the choice of the target of an attack. To a much larger extent than printed publications, the Internet allows lone wolves to be part of a wide movement, even though they do not attend meetings, subscribe to any mailing list, and generally try to remain invisible” (Levin, 2002, p. 965). I do not think it is a matter of coincidence that a significant increase in the number of terrorist actions involving lone actors took place in the 1990s, i.e. at a time when the Internet began to develop dynamically. Another likely reason for the future dynamic development of activities based on the lone wolf strategy is their positive evaluation in the so-called "terrorist movement". For many ideological radicals, undertaking independent activity (both legal and illegal) is a testimony to the highest commitment an individual can make. It is no wonder that radical literature is full of calls to "not look at others" and to take action on your own. Such action, according to many, is not only "something extremely noble", but also relatively safe (mainly due to the difficulty of surveillance). Also in the "Declaration of War", considered one of the most radical texts referring to the “single issue” model, an incentive for this type of action can be found. The term "single issue" refers to the terrorism of one issue, which is usually defined as an individual or group activity based on violence, the purpose of which is not so much to induce deeper (revolutionary) social or political changes, but to solve one problem ("settling" one specific issue) (Posluszna, 2016). "Declaration of War": "We must remember that this is the time of war. Each of us is a potential enemy. Moving on, we must work alone or in the company of a trusted person. However, when choosing your comrades, remember that people do not always remain faithful to each other. Liberators do not have a leader, because their organization does not create any structures. We are independent people who feel responsible for our family" (Wyjācy Wilk, 1998, p. 71).

It is difficult to imagine the law enforcement bodies to be able to effectively prevent actions of an individual nature, especially when their perpetrators do not inform about their intentions in advance, and do not send any forecasting signals. When such individuals decide to launch an attack that threatens air safety, the consequences must necessarily be dire. These difficulties are also exacerbated by the fact that these are usually highly fanatical individuals who resort to the "lone wolf" strategies and they do not withdraw due to failures or due to lack of support from other participants of the movement. It happens that such people create an all-channel virtual network in the area of information flow or they settle for a star network or a multi-node network. In the former case, there is a certain chance that their activity in the network will be tracked and recognized, in the latter (much more frequent) such possibility does not exist in practice. Then, their capture only becomes a matter of chance.

Declaration of interest

The author declares that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this article.

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