

Terrorist Target Selection: The Case of Anders Behring Breivik

by Cato Hemmingby and Tore Bjørgo

Abstract

The 22 July 2011 attacks in Norway offers a rare opportunity to study in detail the factors and circumstances which influenced the decision-making of the lone actor terrorist and the target selection process in particular. The terrorist had more than 65 potential targets that were on his mind, but he included only a third of these in concrete plans, before he ended up attacking only two. Which factors made him dismiss some targets to the benefit of others, and at what time in the selection process did crucial decision-making sequences take place? What were the alternatives he considered? The study will analyse the dynamic interaction between four main components: Ideology defines the overall objectives and the enemy picture, as well as the reasoning and moral reflections that constitute the basic fundament of the actor's rationality. Strategy is the long-term plan for how the overarching objectives are to be achieved. Furthermore, the decision-making is also influenced by internal factors possessed by the terrorist actor, such as manpower, skills, funding, weapons, psychological make-up, and external factors outside the terrorist's control, such as counterterrorism efforts, local environment, gun control laws or unexpected events.

Keywords: Terrorist targets, decision-making, modus operandi, lone actor

Introduction

Right-wing terrorist Anders Behring Breivik conducted two extremely brutal attacks on 22 July 2011 in Norway. He first detonated a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device in the centre of the Government District in downtown Oslo, which he followed up with a shooting attack at the small island Utøya, where the Labour Party's youth wing (AUF, Worker's Youth League) held its annual summer camp. Eight persons were killed in Oslo, while 69 people lost their lives at Utøya, making Breivik the most deadly solo terrorist in Europe thus far.

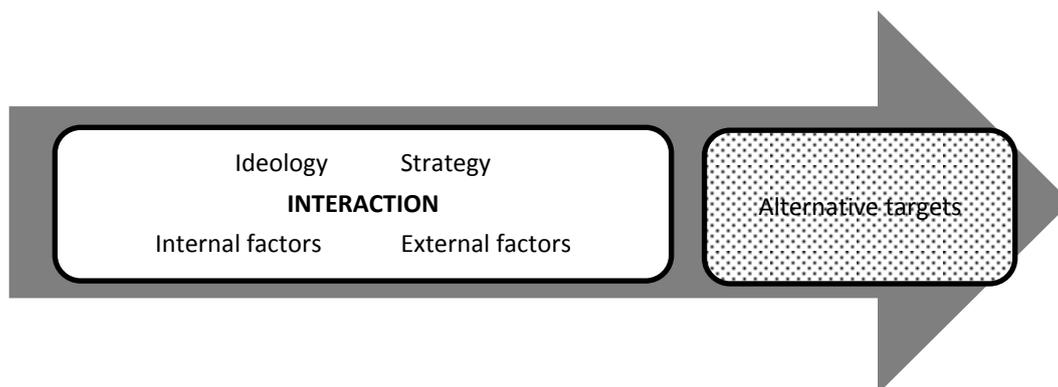
Most of the research and general literature following the 22 July attacks in Norway focused on the background of the perpetrator and his radicalisation process.[1] The objective of this article has been to map the operational aspects of this case, with an emphasis on the target selection process. How and why did Breivik end up with the final targets he attacked, and what were the alternatives? Also, which factors made him dismiss the targets not attacked, and at what time in the target selection process did crucial decision-making sequences take place? In most terrorist plots such questions are unlikely to be ever answered due to lack of information. For the present article, the amount and quality of the information available offered a unique opportunity to analyse a target selection process on the individual level. Such opportunities do not come often, and accordingly the authors believe this research represents an original contribution to existing research on modus operandi, pre-attack behaviour and lone actor terrorism.[2]

Regarding primary sources for this research, the General Attorney granted the authors unlimited access to all the protocolled transcripts from the police investigative interviews, as well as video recordings from the most interesting sequences. Moreover, the news agency NTB provided the authors with accurate word-for-word transcripts from the trial. Various court documents have also made an important contribution to this research. In addition, the perpetrator's compendium titled *2083 – A European Declaration of Independence* was consulted. It was a theoretical product, established to present Breivik's ideological narrative and to provide others with practical advice.[3] Although the compendium has value for understanding Breivik's ideology and mindset, it has only limited relevance when looking into his planning and decision-making for the 22 July attacks. Additionally, the terrorist's narcissistic personality and his eagerness to be seen as an extraordinarily capable terrorist have been given careful attention during our work. By triangulating information from different primary sources, the risk of stepping into potential pitfalls has been minimised.

The Journey from Target Browsing to Attack

A target selection process begins when the terrorist actor in question takes a decision to actually launch a terrorist attack, and it culminates with the attack, or attempt of such, on the final target(s). Between the start and the end of this journey there are multiple variables affecting the target selection, and these have to be identified and sorted systematically for further qualitative analysis. Scholars with an interest in modus operandi questions will know C.J.M. Drake’s work and his comprehensive approach regarding targeting.[4] This research uses a similar approach, but with a slightly different structure and a more inter-active framework with more focus on the dynamics and non-linear development of events, in contrast to Drake’s funnel-like, linear typologies.[5]

On the graph’s upper level, the terrorists’ *ideology* and *strategy* represent the major framework they operate within. In fact, this may be all we know about actors in an early phase of their existence. More concretely, ideological perspectives supply us with the overall objectives and the enemy picture, as well as the reasoning and moral reflections that constitute the basic fundament of the actor’s rationality. Strategy is basically the long-term plan for *how* the overarching objectives are to be achieved.[6] Large organizations may use different strategies in order to achieve specific objectives, but most terrorist cells and lone actors are likely to operate following simpler and straightforward strategies. For example, they might consider one-offs versus a series of attacks, whether to attack indiscriminately or discriminately, or choose between mass casualties or limited casualties.



Moving to the lower level of the model, there are numerous variables linked to the terrorists’ capacity and scope of operational activity. Here the *internal factors* are those possessed or controlled by the terrorists themselves which influence their capacity, like manpower, skills, funding, weapons and intelligence-gathering ability. The psychological dimension – on the individual level, as well as intragroup dynamics – is also important. Personality disorders are not unusual, and this may affect targeting decisions too.[7] Then there are *external factors* the terrorists have to take into account, like counterterrorism efforts, local environment, gun control laws and security efforts protecting attractive targets. Finally, one should not forget that pure coincidences, serendipity and bad luck might enter the scene unexpectedly at any time during a terrorist operation - right until the very last moment before a target is struck. It can be that a special window of opportunity suddenly appears, or that a terrorist with qualms regarding indiscriminate killings and mass-casualties is forced to abort an attack already under way if “innocent” civilians suddenly turn up. Since the four categories of independent variables affect each other in a highly dynamic process, *interaction* is a keyword. But identifying and sorting variables involved will rarely explain the full dynamics seen or the decision-making process. Here, in-depth qualitative analysis has to be applied, and for this research case study the method of process-tracing has been applied.[8]

As described, all terrorists will act within some kind of framework, affected by a number of constraints. Ideally a target should be in accordance with all kinds of preferences the actor may have, but that is probably rarely the case. As problems surface, it is more likely that a change of priorities, compromises and pragmatism enter the arena. Important to remember, however, terrorists will most often have a number of potential targets to choose from as the targeting planning process is about to be concluded – and especially those with few moral qualms.

Therefore, minor details and situational circumstances may prove decisive in the final decision-making phase.

The Dataset

In targeting research, targets *not* chosen for attack are just as interesting as the targets hit. We have therefore mapped all persons, institutions and organizations Breivik expressed a distinct hostility towards during the police investigative interviews and the trial. Of the 65 potential targets we identified, 44 of them were never part of any concrete plans Breivik considered. Nine of them were totally unrealistic, beyond Breivik's capacity, or not in accordance with his priorities.[9] As for the remaining 35, these were within the terrorist's capacity, but apparently not important enough to qualify for direct targeting. With a few exceptions these targets were not highly symbolic, and Breivik probably did not see the potential for a spectacular shock-attack with most of them. Another factor coming into play was that Breivik decided to concentrate on one political party only, namely the Labour Party. Following this, politicians from other parties were excluded as targets.[10]

Moving on to the 21 individuals and institutions that were part of Breivik's different plans, there is one important observation. Breivik would not initiate an attack against a single individual only, as that would not be grand enough.[11] Accordingly, the five individuals seen in concrete plans were regarded as "bonuses" in specific attack scenarios. Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg and Minister of Justice and Police, Knut Storberget, could have become victims in the Government District explosion, if they had been present at the time of detonation. Likewise, journalist Marte Michelet, Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Støre and former Prime Minister Go Harlem Brundtland could have become "bonus" targets at Utøya.[12] This means there were 16 potential main targets Breivik concentrated on, namely the Government District, the Royal Palace, Oslo City Hall, the Parliament, the Parliament District, the Directorate of Immigration, the Labour Party building, the office of the Socialist Left Party, the SKUP investigative journalism conference, the Labour Party's annual convention, the Labour Party Youth Camp at Utøya, Blitz Anarchist house, the newspapers VG, Dagsavisen and Aftenposten, as well as the Norwegian broadcasting company NRK. Looking at the characteristics of these targets, Breivik's main focus was on authorities and news media in particular, including a few time-fixed events.

The Concrete Plans

In order to explain the dynamics of Breivik's targeting process and how he ended up with the Government District and the Labour Party Youth Camp at Utøya as his final targets of choice, a more in-depth look into his concrete plans and operational proceedings is called for.

What seems to have been a rather complex main plan in an early phase involved three vehicle-borne IEDs against different targets, followed by three shooting attacks against other targets.[13] With reference to the 16 possible targets Breivik considered in concrete plans, the decision-making was partly simple, and partly complicated. The simple part was that H-building in the Government District, housing the Prime Minister's Office in the top floors and the Ministry of Justice and Police from 12th floor and below, always was bomb target number one. This iconic building, symbolising the Labour Party-led coalition government that Breivik held accountable for the alleged Cultural Marxist take-over in the Norwegian society, was more or less a perfect target. The Labour party HQ, located just a couple of hundred meters from the Government District was the clear bomb target number two.

In contrast to target one and two, Breivik had substantial difficulties deciding on bomb target three. He considered several buildings in the capital for this, namely the Parliament building, the Parliament district, the City Hall, the newspaper Aftenposten's building, the Directorate of Immigration and the Royal Palace, but most of them did not fit the bill.[14] The Directorate of Immigration was probably not high-symbolic enough, since it was a rather non-descript building in a busy neighbourhood. The potential for unacceptable "civilian losses" excluded the newspaper *Aftenposten*, which only occupied a small part of the tall building. The City Hall, on the other hand, was difficult since it was housing the conservative-led Oslo municipality

administration.[15] The potential for a high number of random casualties was also a factor with regard to the iconic Parliament building; in addition, Breivik was unsure how to get the vehicle into a good tactical position. As for the Parliament District, this stands out as a rather unattractive alternative with regard to symbolism, and also here the perpetrator would have little control over random casualties. On the other side, the Royal Palace attracted the terrorist's attention. It is an iconic building overlooking the Karl Johan high street, and it is located at a satisfactory distance from other buildings and crowded areas. Breivik also stated that it was an attractive factor that a blown-up palace would be observed from the normally very crowded Karl Johan High street.[16] Additionally, the drive-through entrance in the middle of the palace was perfect for positioning a bomb vehicle. Breivik ended up with the Royal Palace as his third bomb target, but with an almost ironic prerequisite, namely that the royal family should not be present at the time of the detonation, because he considered himself to be a monarchist.[17] The bomb attack should simply be a warning to the royal family due to their immigrant-friendly attitude.[18]

After placing the last bomb vehicle at the Royal Palace, Breivik in one scenario planned to go to the Blitz Anarchist house and shoot dead as many as possible, before moving on to the Dagsavisen newspaper, and finally the Socialist Left Party's headquarter. All of these objects were located relatively close to each other, and it is likely that this influenced Breivik's decision-making process. One shooting target discarded was the Norwegian broadcasting company NRK building. Its location, and Breivik's lack of knowledge about the structure inside, led to its elimination from the targeting short list.[19] In general, the most important part for Breivik was the bomb attacks – the shooting attacks came second.[20]

At one point, Breivik dropped the idea of conducting three shooting attacks. Instead, he opted for a modified main plan, combining the three car bomb attacks, with one small arms attack.[21] The targets for the bombs were the same, but the three previous potential targets for a firearm attack were all dropped, in favour for the SKUP conference in Tønsberg, about 100km away from Oslo.[22] SKUP is an annual prize conference for investigative journalism and the event was due early in April 2011. If he was not ready by that time, he had an alternative shooting attack target—the annual Labour Party convention, scheduled for about a week later.[23] This backup target was in accordance with his compendium, where he specifically mentions the annual meetings of the socialist/social democrat parties in Europe as prioritised targets.[24] A closer examination of Breivik's operational proceedings explains how and why Breivik's modified main assault plan was also to change.

From Thinking to Acting

Breivik's personal background is not as relevant for his modus operandi as it might be for his radicalization process, but one factor regarding his finances should be mentioned. The terrorist had earned about 420,000 GBP (our conversion from NOK) by selling false university documents from 2002 to 2006.[25] When he moved back in with his mother in 2006, Breivik claimed he had about somewhere between 56,000 and 68,000 GBP in the bank, and 34,000 GBP in cash. In addition, in the autumn of 2009 he managed to obtain ten credit cards, which provided him with an extra 26,700 GBP.[26] With a sound financial situation and no job constraints, Breivik could devote himself totally to the operation.

Regarding the time for deciding on a terrorist attack, the court concluded that Breivik had been strongly goal-oriented since 2006.[27] Breivik himself claims to have started the work with his compendium around 2006-2007.[28] It is therefore likely that from around this moment in time Breivik was what psychiatrist Randi Rosenqvist at Ila Prison and Detention Centre described as *a man with a mission*.[29]

The first documented evidence of practical preparations for the attacks dates back to May 2009, when Breivik registered the agricultural company *Breivik Geofarm*. This provided him with a cover for renting a farm, and enabled him to buy fertilizer and other components necessary for bomb-making. From then on he made other practical preparations too. He gathered more than 8,000 email addresses by using two Facebook accounts, for the forthcoming distribution of his compendium.[30] He legally bought a Mini-Ruger rifle in November 2010,

and a Glock pistol in March 2011 – allegedly for hunting and sports shooting purposes.[31] Moreover, he bought weapons parts, clothing and other equipment he needed. In the summer of 2010, he also went to Prague and purchased Norwegian police insignia from a local print shop.[32]

Regarding finding a farm, Breivik started on this during autumn 2010, but it proved to be difficult.[33] As time went by he approached several landlords at the same time. On 29 March 2011, a lessor in Sunnmøre (more than 500 km from Oslo) initiated an email dialogue with Breivik, in response to the latter's Internet advertisement on an agricultural site. Breivik ended the correspondence days later, however, when he became aware that it was an eco farm – realizing that cow manure is useless for making improvised explosives.[34] On 6 April 2011, Breivik could finally put his signature on a contract, renting the farm Vålstua about 200 kilometres north-east of Oslo, from May onwards. By that time, both his alternative time-fixed shooting attack targets were passed, so now the Labour Party's Youth Camp at Utøya surfaced as the most attractive target for a shooting spree.[35]

Breivik regarded Utøya as a perfect target. He estimated that there would be 700 participants in a limited area, surrounded by cold water, 550 meters away to the closest shore.[36] He had been keeping Utøya in mind for about a year as an alternative target.[37] In court he stated that “*my goal was to kill 600 people*” – first and foremost by shooting and chasing the panicking youngsters out in the cold water and making them drown.[38] He also hoped to decapitate members of a top category “Cultural Marxist” (exactly who that description applied to would depend on the day of the attack). Journalist Marte Michelet was to visit Wednesday, Minister of Foreign Affairs Jonas Gahr Støre was due Thursday, and former Prime minister Brundtland had been invited for Friday. Breivik wanted to videotape the whole decapitation sequence and put it on the Internet.[39]

At this point it is worth noting that the terrorist, with Utøya as a target, had become pragmatic. According to his own theoretical target classification system, with A, B, C and D traitors, category C traitors (which the participants at Utøya were) should not be given death punishment.[40] Pushed on this fact during the trial, Breivik explained that the guidelines in the manifesto were to be followed as far as possible, but that adjustments could be made if it was not possible to reach the primary target categories.[41] He also rationalized his targeting by claiming that most of the youths were political leaders. This was hardly the case, and Breivik's explanation was a weak attempt of post-attack rationalization.[42] Another interesting point is that Breivik chose to do the attack on Utøya, even though he himself believed that this attack would be seen as illegitimate by 50% of his fellow ultra-nationalists— in contrast to the bomb attack in downtown Oslo for which he expected 100% backing from his main reference group.[43] Breivik stated that his actions might not be understood until decades later, when the situation between the Europeans and the Muslims had deteriorated even further.

When it comes to information gathering and reconnaissance, Breivik based his activity on the media, on-line sources, and physical hostile reconnaissance. The amount and quality of this activity was, however, limited.[44] One constraint for the terrorist was the fear of being detected by the national police security service due to online activity. He was very careful using his computer for information gathering, he masked his IP address when visiting far-right forums, and he consciously moderated his extreme views when in discussions with others.[45] He was equally afraid of detection when he was outdoors looking at buildings he considered for targeting, believing that even a short glance at CCTV cameras would “flag” him.[46] He did have a point, however, when stating that details were not always important, as long as he was able to drive the vehicle to the entrance of the building he wanted to bomb.[47] Breivik acted cautiously as he bought weapon accessories, protection gear, and items linked to bomb production. On a few occasions, however, he was forced to accept some risk, e.g. when he bought sodium nitrate from a pharmacy, as well as when he acquired the powder fuse and 150 kg aluminium powder from Poland.[48] A practical constraint for the terrorist was his class B driver's license, which limited him to vehicles with a maximum load weight of 1,200 kg. While this did not impact the target selection, it did limit the size and weight of the planned home-made bombs.[49]

Too Little, Too Late – Towards the Final Plan

Settled at his rented farm, Breivik estimated that it would take him four weeks to make the three bombs needed

for his main plan. It turned out to take three times as long just to make one.[50] The Norwegian fertilizer manufacturers' efforts to make fertilizers with high nitrogen content less suitable for bomb making caused him trouble – and cost him time.[51] Breivik was also running out of money. His bank accounts were empty by 26 April and he had to start using his credit cards.[52] Breivik now became concerned about being listed with payment problems, which could cause him trouble, when trying to rent the two vehicles necessary for his operation. He was also aware that the street leading to the H-building was to be permanently closed for security reasons after years of bureaucratic and political delays.[53] Earlier on, he had also been worried that a jihadi cell arrested in Oslo in late 2010, would push the date for closing the street forward.[54] Finally, his choice of Utøya as a shooting attack target – a time-fixed event – added to the pressure.

As Breivik worked on his explosives, he must have realized that the timing of his planned attack on the Government District got worse week by week, since the offices are quite empty during the holiday season. By the end of June, Breivik also realized he had to carry out the attack with just one bomb, and from then on his focus was solely on a bomb attack against the Government District and the shooting attack at Utøya.[55] This narrowed the window of opportunity to the month of July 2011.[56]

The Day of the Attacks

On the evening of 20 July, Breivik drove his rented Volkswagen Crafter, loaded with the improvised explosive device (IED) to Oslo. He parked it a short walk away from his mother's flat, and worried that foul smells from the bomb might raise suspicions of people in the area. Thus, he placed a note on the driver's seat explaining that the car was in the business of sewer- and drain-cleaning. He thought this would minimize the chances for someone to report complaints or becoming suspicious.[57] Breivik slept over at his mother's place and took a train back to Rena the following morning. At the farm he prepared the detonator part for transport, as he wanted to take this separately from the booster charge to Oslo.[58] At 8.40pm on the same day, Breivik drove the Fiat Doblo to Oslo. He arrived about 11.30 p.m. and parked it right behind the Crafter, before walking to his mother's apartment.[59]

Next morning, on the day of the attacks, Breivik was delayed. He was exhausted by the night of 21 July and woke up a bit late. He then experienced technical problems with the preparations for uploading a propaganda movie on YouTube, meant to put the terrorist attacks in an ideological context. He got delayed and then had to drive his escape car in position. He did this around noon, before returning to his mother's flat by taxi. Putting his ideological compendium online took more time than he had estimated, consequently leading to further delays, and this reduced the success potential for his operation.[60] Originally he had planned to detonate the charge in the Government District at 10 a.m.[61] His delays changed targeting aspects of the operation in two ways. Firstly, he initiated the attack in the Government District at a time when many government employees had left work early. Secondly, he knew already in the flat the same morning that he had no chance of getting out to Utøya in time for catching former PM Gro Harlem Brundtland.

Breivik drove to the Government District just before 3 p.m. He parked his van in front of the main entrance to the H-building at 3:17 p.m., lit the fuse, stepped out of the vehicle and locked the doors. Then, in his fake police uniform and with the Glock pistol in his hand, he started walking towards his escape car at Hammersborg Torg square nearby. The bomb detonated at 3:25 p.m. Breivik was by then already on his way to Utøya, listening to the radio for news related to the bomb attack. He reached the landside of Utøya around 4:30 p.m., and took a break near the ferry terminal, in order to adjust both clothing and equipment. He wanted a lighter outfit in order to improve his mobility. About 5 p.m. he drove down to the pier, and managed to convince those present that he was a police officer who had been tasked to secure the camp after the attack in Oslo. Those present accepted his explanation. The ferry was called for and shortly after the terrorist was on his way to part two of his operation.

Breivik initiated the shooting attack on the island immediately after getting off the ferry, at 5:21 p.m. He first shot the off-duty police officer responsible for security and the female chief camp administrator. Then he started

the systematic hunt for Labour Party youths all over the small island, killing many from a very close distance. He also managed to lure many youths out of their hiding, with his fake police uniform and assurances that he had come to save them. As he moved around on the island he kept himself out of sight from the landside, in case police snipers came to the scene. He was also careful when moving around in buildings, avoiding small and narrow rooms, because he could be vulnerable for counterattacks. The terrorist kept on murdering for a long time, but when the National Response Police Unit arrived on the island 6:30 p.m., Breivik gave himself up without any resistance just four minutes later. By then, Breivik had killed 69 people on the island.[62] Adding the victims who died from the bombing in the Government District, the total number of killed were 77 – a number affecting the annual terrorism statistics in Europe significantly.

A Personalized and Customized Ideology

If we return to the comprehensive model used for sorting the variables which impacted on Breivik's targeting process, beginning with the ideological factors, he had, like many other right-wing extremists, a double enemy image.[63] The external enemy were Muslims, and especially immigrants and refugees. The inner enemy (*the traitors*) were those responsible for the development, typically authorities, political leftists, journalists, and the cultural elite – what Breivik interchangeably called *Cultural Marxists*, *Multiculturalists* and the *Marxist/Multicultural Alliance*. [64] Breivik chose to attack the inner enemy, namely the Labour party and the so-called Cultural Marxists. He did initially consider attacking the external enemy, but decided against this, remembering the murder of Benjamin Hermansen in Oslo in 2001.[65] The 15 year old, with a mother from Norway and father from Ghana, was killed by neo-Nazis, and the massive public condemnation following this killing, convinced Breivik that such an action was likely to be counter-productive for the movement.[66]

Breivik's personality and narcissistic nature was a driver for his spectacular shock attack strategy, and his general lack of empathy enabled him to conduct his barbaric actions. Breivik made it clear in his compendium that women had to be killed alongside men.[67] On the other side, he did not want to be considered a child killer, although 33 of those killed at Utøya were under the age of 18 – with two as young as 14.[68] Breivik said he assumed everybody had to be at least age 16 in order to participate at Utøya, and that he expected to confront people with an average age of 22-23 years.[69] The fact that he actually spared a 9 year-old boy on Utøya did not alter that fact significantly.[70] Breivik seemed unprepared for the quick decision-making situations he found himself in on the island, and in court he admitted it was difficult.[71]

With regard to the degree of discrimination and the civilian loss factor, Breivik favoured selective targeting, but opted for a mass casualty focus as far as his enemies were concerned. This means a wide scope of target alternatives, in reality only exceeded by those terrorist actors practicing totally indiscriminate attacks with mass casualty potential. Breivik stated that as much as 50% civilian losses would be acceptable, and that less than 10% would be optimal.[72] It is nevertheless a fact that the civilian loss factor turned out to be a constraint for him on many target objects, which should come as no surprise for a terrorist planning to operate in an urban area with 1,000 kg fertilizer bombs without any pre-warnings.

The Strategy of a Massive Shock Attack

In court, Breivik gave four motives for the terrorist attacks.[73] These were to bring attention to the cause, distribution of the online compendium, to hold accountable those who were responsible for promoting multiculturalism in Norway, and to launch a provocation leading to a persecution of the moderate cultural conservatives and their radicalisation. The nature of these objectives is typical for terrorists; in terms of strategy these can be linked to *advertisement*, *compliance*, *endorsement* and *provocation*. [74] Breivik saw the struggle from a long-term perspective, namely in the light of a forthcoming, ultranationalist struggle in Europe. He assumed that his actions would be condemned today, but understood and supported at a later stage of the conflict.[75]

Breivik's main strategic objective was to conduct a devastating shock-attack.[76] It had to be brutal and devastating, and only a *spectacular* (attack) would do. Breivik's grand inspiration with his bomb attack against the Government District came from the first attack on the World Trade Centre in New York in 1993, and Timothy McVeigh's bombing of a government building in Oklahoma in 1995.[77] Breivik was of the opinion that a single, brutal mass-casualty operation would produce more fear than a series of small-scale attacks. A prerequisite for this, however, was that the authorities and the public believe that there would be more terrorists out there, ready to strike, since it was the expectation of more violence that would bring about the behaviour he expected.[78] This is probably why Breivik immediately following his capture claimed that there were two other cells ready to launch attacks. Additionally, an overwhelmingly brutal operation would ensure a global media coverage.

Breivik also found that working as a one-man cell gave the best chance of success. In court he recalled how the white supremacy-group *The Order* had been crushed by law enforcement agencies in the mid-1980s.[79] Breivik therefore never even tried to involve others as he started planning his actions. Through the whole operational phase he made a point of avoiding any overt or traceable contact with domestic militant nationalists, due to the risk of being detected – accepting that this self-imposed restriction would reduce his operational capacity. In his compendium he drew lines between the number of perpetrators, labour, time required to complete the operation and risk of detection.[80]

Breivik's Operational Capacity

Nothing in Breivik's personal background makes him a particularly resourceful and capable solo terrorist. He is not extraordinarily intelligent. He does not have any technical education or skills of value, and he never did compulsory military service – which he later regretted.[81] Breivik had limited experience with the use of firearms, and no previous knowledge of explosives.[82] What then enabled him to pull off a complex terrorist operation? Breivik's personality has already been mentioned, but his ability to stay focused and motivated over a long period of time was remarkable. His personality disorder and lack of empathy boosted his ability to execute brutal and cold-blooded acts. On the practical side, Breivik did a thorough job on the bomb production. Although he had practically no understanding of how explosives work after detonation, the bomb construction was solid enough. Furthermore, his extreme security consciousness enabled him to avoid detection during the long phase of planning, preparation and execution. Even though his close surroundings did note extremist statements on some occasions, Breivik never disclosed his plans.[83] Additionally, his financial situation was initially very strong and without a job he had time to fully devote himself to preparing a terrorist operation. As to his ability in terms of planning and operationalization, we found a more complex picture, taking into account that he was sophisticated in some areas, and surprisingly superficial in other areas.

The External Factors

The capacity of the perpetrator must be seen against the background of a societal context. Until the 22 July 2011 attacks, the Norwegian society had been blessed with an absence of major terrorist incidents. Accordingly, there had not been any significant reforms or a substantial focus on societal security issues with regard to thwarting terrorism. In fact, the planned street closure of Grubbegata in the Government District illustrated how the municipality, business interests, neighbours and the media refused to recognize the need for a very basic protective security measure – and all this in combination with a passive government leadership with regard to the realization of it. An editorial in the leading Norwegian newspaper *Aftenposten* with the headline “Hypothetical and hysterical,” slammed and ridiculed the proposed street closure more than four years before Breivik struck.[84] As such, it is no exaggeration to say that the degree of openness in the Norwegian society was significant before the Breivik attacks, and the security efforts around highly symbolic state buildings were limited. Notably, the national police security service had also been affected by historical developments. A few, small-scale incidents with far-right extremists for the last decades had by 2011 been overshadowed by the

growing threat from militant Islamists. Breivik was on the outside of the threat picture in Norway in 2011.[85] On the practical side, Breivik had the advantage of operating on his home ground. Furthermore, the weapons regulations at the time made it relatively easy for Breivik to obtain firearms legally.

Conclusion

Anders Behring Breivik was not a typical solo terrorist or lone actor profile. His shock attack strategy, mass-casualty focus, operational security consciousness, and the remorseless acts he carried out at Utøya were beyond what most lone actor terrorists would consider doing on their own. His megalomaniac personality influenced several of these factors, but if we leave out the aberrant characteristics and skills of Breivik, he was quite average in some other ways. His general background, his radicalization process and his ideological foundation were not unusual. Moreover, he was not without flaws when he planned or conducted his terrorist operation. He significantly miscalculated the time needed to find a farm, and he only managed to make one bomb, instead of three as originally planned. Furthermore, he made several basic mistakes during the operation. One example is related to the fact that he planned to set fire to the houses at Utøya, but he had brought with him 8 litres of diesel instead of gasoline, which would have been easier to ignite – and he had lost his lighter.[86]

Overall, this research has shown that even a seemingly ruthless terrorist like Breivik was affected by an overarching framework and a number of constraints – also influencing his target selection process. A high number of variables linked to ideology, strategy, internal factors and external factors – including unexpected constraints and pure coincidences – were involved, and the process became profoundly dynamic. Breivik experienced that targeting processes are not linear and fully controllable. This frustrated the Norwegian terrorist, who stated that he probably had to change his plans about 20-30 times.[87] He also became pragmatic when he chose the event at Utøya as a target.

The Labour Party and the media represented the most attractive targets for Breivik, but in the end no media targets were actually attacked. This demonstrates that the interaction between different constraints derailed Breivik from his stated partial goal of striking the Norwegian press, leading him to hit the Labour party-led coalition government and the party's youth organization only. Also, Breivik's bomb attacks against iconic targets had a higher priority than the shooting attack. It is therefore a matter of tragic irony that the shooting attack at Utøya outbided Breivik's number one priority – the Government District – with regard to the death tolls. This also demonstrates that extensive shock attacks can be conducted just as effectively with small arms as with large bombs.

Finally, many of the circumstances and factors that influenced Breivik's decision-making and latitude, such as time, capacity and funding, are generic to all terrorists. In this study it has been interesting to note how information availability and concrete security measures (or the lack thereof) affected Breivik. A lack of information and insight made both the parliament and the national broadcaster NRK less attractive targets for him. In general, security precautions at potential target objects force perpetrators to collect more information and conduct thorough hostile reconnaissance, enhancing the possibility for detection. An even though target substitution always will be a factor, the next alternative targets may possibly lead to a less damaging and lethal outcome.

The Need for More Research

Modus operandi, terrorist decision-making and target selection are complex matters, and even though there is an increasing amount of research into this area, more research is called for. Here we will limit ourselves to two issues that deserve more attention. The first issue concerns the concrete decision-making processes of those planning and conducting terrorist attacks. This study of Anders Behring Breivik has shown that this research can be done in reasonable detail with extensive materials at hand, but this covers only one case and one individual. More in-depth single case studies will therefore contribute to an increased understanding

regarding terrorist decision-making related to targeting in general.

Another issue is hostile reconnaissance activity. To what degree do terrorists gather information about potential targets during their planning process, online and/or through physical reconnaissance? Breivik was surprisingly superficial in some areas related to information gathering and reconnaissance, but in several cases related to militant Islamists, a substantial amount of web-based target browsing and extensive preparations have been noted.[88] Learning more about how terrorists conduct information gathering and hostile reconnaissance, will provide valuable knowledge with regard to how security measures affect them, how potential perpetrators are effectively deterred, how they can be detected on site while conducting hostile reconnaissance, as well as how their information gathering abilities can be reduced. Better knowledge in these areas is more or less a prerequisite for taking protective security a step further.

About the Authors: *Cato Hemmingby is Research Fellow at the Norwegian Police University College, and head of analysis and evaluation in a governmental institution. Research interests are linked to terrorism, intelligence, protective security and police response. Cato Hemmingby is, with Tore Bjørgo, author of The Dynamics of a Terrorist Targeting Process: Anders Behring Breivik and the 22 July Attacks in Norway. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. His latest article is Exploring the Continuum of Lethality: Militant Islamists' Targeting Preferences in Europe; Perspectives on Terrorism, Volume 11, Issue 5, 2017.*

Tore Bjørgo is Director of the Center for Research on Extremism (C-REX) and Professor at the University of Oslo and the Norwegian Police University College. He has published extensively on right-wing extremism and violence, terrorism, disengagement from extremist groups, counter-terrorism and crime prevention. Among his recent books are Vigilantism against Migrants and Minorities (forthcoming), Preventing Crime: A Holistic Approach (2016), Strategies for Preventing Terrorism (2013), and Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement (2009). He is Associate Editor of the journal Perspectives on Terrorism.

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