

Case 94: Minnesota Mall Stabbings

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On September 17, 2016, Dahir Adan, a 20-year-old Somali-American citizen who had emigrated as a small child, entered a shopping mall in St. Cloud, Minnesota, dressed as a security guard. He slashed at shoppers and store clerks with two kitchen knives wounding ten of them, none very seriously. In the process, he repeatedly shouted “Allah Akbar” (God is great). He also asked individuals if they were Muslim and, if they responded in the negative, he sometimes, but not always, tried to stab them. One of the shoppers was an off-duty policeman who shot and killed Adan when he lunged at the officer several times.

Three days later, the FBI took over the case, investigating it as a “potential act of terrorism.”¹ And two weeks after that, the Special Agent in Charge suggested that Adan had been “radicalized” and that this had happened “almost overnight.” Once a bright and amiable college student, he said, Adan became sullen and withdrawn, developed a strong interest in Islamic studies, and chided young women at home to be more devout. This, concluded the Agent darkly, was “consistent with the philosophies of violent, radical Islamic groups.”²

After interviewing scores of people and searching Adan’s car, social media accounts, digital devices, and phone, authorities have disclosed little information to support the Special Agent’s early speculations. In fact, a year later, they were saying that they may never know what inspired Adan’s rampage.³ Niko Pittore, an intern at the Cato Institute when he wrote this case study, concludes that this may well suggest that the episode should not be considered to be one of terrorism. Lacking evidence of a political, or political-like, motive, the incoherent rampage seems more like a hate crime than terrorism: the attacker was a Muslim, he shouted a religious incantation several times, and he seems to have wanted only to slash at non-Muslims.

Publications by Islamic State, or ISIS, disagree. They declared Adan to be a “soldier” of their caliphate, who carried out his attack “in response to the calls to target the citizens of the nations involved in the Crusader coalition.” Presumably dismayed by the limited amount of mayhem their “soldier” was able to inflict in this case, they went on to stress, “It is explicitly advised not to use kitchen knives, as their basic structure is not designed to handle the kind of vigorous application used for assassinations and slaughter.”⁴

Despite the insistence of ISIS and the musings of the FBI’s Special Agent in Charge, no connections to “violent, radical Islamic groups” has been found.

¹ Peter Cox and Jason Collins, “After a week, more questions, few answers in St. Cloud mall attack,” *mpnnews.com*, September 23, 2016.

² Jennifer Brooks, Faiza Mahamud and Paul Walsh, “Police show video of St. Cloud mall attacker’s fatal encounter with off-duty officer,” *startribune.com*, October 7, 2016.

³ Stephen Montemayor, “One year later, motive of St. Cloud mall attacker remains unclear,” *startribune.com*, September 17, 2017.

⁴ Brooks et al, “Police show video.”

Two months before his rampage, in fact, Adan had retweeted a post that said, “Don’t ever say that ISIS represents Islam.”⁵

⁵ Montemayor, “One year later.”

Case 94: Minnesota Mall Stabbings

Niko Pittore

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1. Overview

Dahir Ahmed Adan, a 20-year-old Somali national born in Kenya, had come to the United States with his family as a infant or small child and was granted US citizenship in 2008. He enrolled at St. Cloud State in Minnesota but stopped enrolling in his sophomore year.¹ Adan was known as a solid, studious, quiet kid who befriended essentially everyone he met. He became a security guard for a provider called Securitas, and his last known job was at an appliance company called Electroalux North America. He had resigned in June 2016.²

On September 17, 2016, Adan came home from his job as a security guard at an unnamed location and didn't remove his uniform—though whether he actually had a job is entirely unknown and there are conflicting reports about that. He told his family that he had work to do that evening, but later apparently texted his boss and told him he wouldn't be coming in.³

Then, still wearing his private security company uniform, Adan entered Crossroads Mall in St. Cloud around 8pm armed with two steak knives.⁴ He stabbed 10 people after first asking some of them if they were Muslim, and he was heard by at least 16 different people to yell “Allah Akbar.”⁵

Jason Falconer, an off-duty police officer was in the mall when Adan approached and asked him if he was a Muslim. Falconer replied “no.” As Adan turned away, Falconer noticed the two knives in his hands. Falconer drew his gun and ordered Adan to drop his weapons after announcing he was a police officer. After a brief chase into Macy's, Falconer shot Adan multiple times after Adan attempted to lunge at him several times with the knives still in his hands. Eventually, Adan died after suffering 6 gunshot wounds. He was the only fatality.⁶ In addition, no one suffered life-threatening injuries.⁷ The Islamic State, per their agenda, were quick to hail the attack, calling Adan “a soldier of the Islamic State.”⁸ One curious thing about this attack is he asked people if they were Muslim. It was reported he stabbed at least one victim who replied “no.”⁹ However, when Officer Falconer replied “no,” Adan just turned and walked away.

¹ Stephanie Petit, “Mall Stabbing Suspect Asked Victims If They Were Muslim, ‘Not Previously Known’ to Authorities: Source,” people.com, September 19, 2016.

² Petit, “Mall Stabbing Suspect Asked Victims If They Were Muslim.”

³ “Minnesota stabbing: Dahir Ahmed Adam was known for calm demeanor,” theguardian.com, September 20, 2016.

⁴ Janelle P. Kendall, “Stearns County Attorney’s Letter on Justified Use of Deadly Force by Off-Duty Police Officer,” Stearns County Courthouse, October 6, 2016.

⁵ Joe Sterling, Max Blau, and Rosa Flores, “Stabbing suspect had gone to mall to buy an iPhone, source says,” cnn.com, September 19, 2016.

⁶ Kendall, “Stearns County Attorney’s Letter.”

⁷ Jessica McBride, “Dahir Adan: 5 Fast Facts You Need to Know,” heavy.com, September 18, 2016, updated: March 30, 2017

⁸ Dustin Volz and Alex Dobuzinskis, “Islamic State claims responsibility for Minnesota mall attack,” reuters.com, September 18, 2016.

⁹ “Dahir Adan: What we know,” startribune.com, September 22, 2017.

Those who knew him were stunned to find out about the stabbing attack. He loved sports far more than religion. He was never the negative type, also very kind and also obtained straight A's. Moreover, he was said to be among the most assimilated Somalis into the American culture.¹⁰

After extensive post-incident investigations, no motivations or goals for the attack were found, although Special Agent in Charge of the FBI Minnesota Office Richard Thornton suggested that Adan had "radicalized overnight."¹¹ Even a year after the attack, the FBI reported that they probably would never find out what drove him to commit this crime or what his endgame was.¹² Without a definitive motivation or endgame, this is unlikely to be an act of terrorism. Defining an attack as terrorism goes way beyond hearing "Allah Akbar" being shouted. A potential parallel can be drawn between this case and the Las Vegas shooting in 2017 in which a millionaire real estate investor shot and killed 58 people and wounded 546 before turning the gun on himself. In this case too, no motivation or endgame has been found.

2. Nature of the adversary

Dahir Ahmed Adan was a Somali national born in Kenya on April 10, 1996. He was twenty at the time of the attack. He came to the United States as a two-month old¹³ with his family and was granted US citizenship in 2008.¹⁴ Not much is known about his family other than he had multiple siblings and they lived in Fargo, North Dakota for a period of time before moving to Minnesota in 2010, some six years prior to the attack.¹⁵ At the time of the attack, he lived with his father; it is not clear what the marriage situation of his parents was.¹⁶ A former neighbor of theirs, Mohamed Mohamud, said they were a well-known family in and around Fargo, known to be very humble people.¹⁷ Adan was enrolled at St. Cloud State, a four-year college, but stopped enrolling during his sophomore year for unknown reasons. His first semester was in 2014 and his last was spring 2016.

¹⁰ Brandon Stahl, Beatrice Dupuy, and Paul Walsh, "Family ID's attacker behind 'potential act of terrorism' in St. Cloud," *startribune.com*, September 19, 2016.; Peter Cox and Jason Collins, "After a week, more questions, few answers in St. Cloud mall attack," *mprnews.com*, September 23, 2016.

¹¹ Stephen Montemayor, "One year later, motive of St. Cloud mall attacker remains unclear," *startribune.com*, September 17, 2017.

¹² Leo Hohmann, "FBI stumped! What's motive of Muslim's 'Allahu Akbar' mall stabbing?" *wnd.com*, September 22, 2017.

¹³ A conflicting report said he moved from Kenya when he was 2 years old: Abigail Hauslohner and Drew Harwell, "An unassuming life before a suspect's rampage in a Minnesota mall," *washingtonpost.com*, September 19, 2016. Another report said he moved to the United States when he was 1 year old: Archie Ingersoll, "Trepidation in Fargo, where St. Cloud assailant spent his boyhood," *twincities.com*, September 19, 2016.

¹⁴ Petit, "Mall Stabbing Suspect Asked Victims If They Were Muslim."

¹⁵ Ingersoll, "Trepidation in Fargo, where St. Cloud assailant spent his boyhood." Faiza Mahamud and Jennifer Brooks, "Family, friends stunned by Dahir Adan's attack in St. Cloud," *startribune.com*, September 20, 2016. Staff writers Ricardo Lopez and Stephen Montemayor contributed to this report.

¹⁶ Esme Murphy, "Family: St. Cloud Mall Suspect Was Picking Up iPhone," *minnesota.cbslocal.com*, September 19, 2016. Stahl et al., "Family ID's attacker."

¹⁷ Mahamud and Brooks, "Family, friends stunned by Dahir Adan's attack in St. Cloud."

Adan named an intended major in Information Systems but was not accepted in that major. University spokesman Adam Hammer said Adan did not have enough credits to declare for the major.¹⁸ Moreover, Hammer said, “I have no information on what type of student he was and whether he withdrew, stopped coming or left for any other reason. All I have is that he previously was enrolled but was not a current student.”¹⁹ Adan was known to be a solid, studious, quiet kid who befriended essentially everyone he met. Those who knew him were stunned to find out about the stabbing attack. He loved sports far more than religion. He was never the negative type, also very kind. He also obtained straight A’s. Moreover, he was said to be among the most assimilated Somalis into American culture.²⁰

He became a security guard for Securitas, a third party security provider, and his services were contracted out to an appliance company called Electrolux North America. He was a temporary guard for Electrolux. He only worked there for a couple months, with his contract ending in June 2016, three months before his attack. It is unclear how effective Adan was as a worker at Electrolux. One Electrolux security guard in St. Cloud declined to comment about what kind of person Adan had been, saying only, “This is bad.”²¹

According to St. Cloud Police Chief Blair Anderson, local police had had three previous encounters with Adan for minor traffic violations.²² When police told his father, Ahmed Adan, about the attack, he said he had no suspicion his son was involved in any terrorist activity. Adan lived with his family, and there are no reports suggesting that he had any problems with his family.

The friends who would talk openly about him said they didn’t believe Adan, who was Muslim, had extremist views.²³ He was remembered as a quiet and studious kid. He was a lover of soccer and basketball. Barakad Omar, a classmate of Adan at Apollo High School, said he was “a good kid” and an A student. Moreover, Jama Alimad, a community leader and a close friend of the family said he was more into sports than religion. She further said he was the “most assimilated kid in the neighborhood.”²⁴ A cousin who lived down the hall in the same building described Adan as a good person who minded his own business.²⁵

Community soccer coach Ahmed Ali said Adan called him two nights before the mall attack to ask advice on how to lose more weight, one of his obsessions. Ali said that although Adan wasn’t social, he didn’t believe he suffered from mental illness. The family denies he was mentally ill.²⁶

Mubarak Ibrahim, who went to junior high, high school and college with Adan said, “He was a good person, he was a nice person. He’s one of those

¹⁸ Petit, “Mall Stabbing Suspect Asked Victims If They Were Muslim.”

¹⁹ Petit, “Mall Stabbing Suspect Asked Victims If They Were Muslim.”

²⁰ Stahl et al., “Family ID’s attacker”; Peter Cox and Jason Collins, “After a week, more questions, few answers in St. Cloud mall attack,” *mpnnews.com*, September 23, 2016.

²¹ Petit, “Mall Stabbing Suspect Asked Victims If They Were Muslim.”

²² “Officer, suspect ID’d in Crossroads stabbings,” *scetimes.com*, September 17, 2016.

²³ Cox and Collins, “After a week, more questions, few answers in St. Cloud mall attack.”

²⁴ Stahl et al., “Family ID’s attacker.”

²⁵ Stahl et al., “Family ID’s attacker.”

²⁶ “Dahir Adan: What we know,” *startribune.com*, September 22, 2016.

people that, when you go up to [him], you don't expect anything negative to come your way. He was fun. "He was a good basketball player — he was a really good basketball player. It's just shocking, you know? And, I just want to say, we don't know his intentions. We don't know what could've caused it, what could've aggravated it. It could've been personal, it could've been any number of things. We shouldn't jump to conclusions is all I'm saying."²⁷

Rahmo Omar saw Adan as a big brother. He was good friends with her own brother and she knows his sisters. She said about Adan, "He was always that really shy, nice kid. You would never associate what happened with him. Sweetest guy you know. Always stood up for people. I've never seen him do anything wrong, in general. He was a straight-A student, very smart. He was very kind. So hearing this, it's very crazy."²⁸

Now they're worried. Not without cause either, as Minnesota has one of the largest Somali-American populations in the United States. According to the 2010 census, 85,700 Somalis live in the United States, and approximately 25,000 of these live in Minnesota.²⁹ Moreover, the local paper reported in January 2016 about 20 percent of St Cloud's students came from homes where the primary language spoken at home was Somali.³⁰

FBI Special Agent Thornton suggested shortly after the attack that it was only recently that Adan's once-promising life veered off-course. According to Thornton, Adan changed "almost overnight" from a bright college student interested in basketball and video games into a sullen, withdrawn young man with an intense interest in Islamic studies. Contradicting others, Thornton claimed Adan went from top grades to flunking out of school, and in addition lost weight, lost interest in his old pastimes, and started chiding the young women in his family to be more devout.³¹ Although St. Cloud State would not reveal the causes, Adan was not currently enrolled in school, but if Thornton is correct, Adan's flunking out of school could be a potentially dangerous catalyst along with his increased interest in Islamic Studies—though an increased interest in Islamic Studies of course in no way makes someone a terrorist.

3. Motivation

Special Agent Thornton told reporters after the attack that Adan may have been radicalized "almost overnight," growing withdrawn and scolding relatives for not being more devout.³² He further said, "In this era of encrypted communications and encrypted devices and so forth, I think it's going to be an increasingly common outcome where we may not have absolute clarity on what

²⁷ Cox and Collins, "After a week, more questions, few answers in St. Cloud mall attack."

²⁸ Cox and Collins, "After a week, more questions, few answers in St. Cloud mall attack."

²⁹ Elizabeth Dunbar, "Survey: Nearly 1 in 3 US Somalis live in Minnesota," mprnews.com, December 14, 2010.

³⁰ Jared Goyette, "Minnesota's Somali leaders condemn stabbing as report identifies suspect," theguardian.com, September 18, 2016.

³¹ Jennifer Brooks, Faiza Mahamud and Paul Walsh, "Police show video of St. Cloud mall attacker's fatal encounter with off-duty officer," startribune.com, October 7, 2016.

³² Montemayor, "One year later, motive of St. Cloud mall attacker remains unclear."

was in people's minds. If you aren't seeing all of their communications, there's always the potential for a gap."³³

However, after investigators spent 19 days interviewing more than 180 people who knew Adan, viewed hundreds of hours of video, traced his digital footprints, and tried to unlock his phone, they could not establish a motivation.³⁴ Indeed, a year after the attack, the FBI reported it had still been unable to pinpoint a motivation and might never be able to do so.³⁵

The only possible insight we have is he made several references to Allah before commencing the attack, shouted "Allah Akbar" (God is the greatest) and asked more than one victim if they were Muslim prior to stabbing them.³⁶ And, to add to the mystery, on the Fourth of July, two months before he plunged kitchen knives into ten shoppers at St. Cloud's Crossroads Center mall after asking some if they were Muslim, Dahir Adan shared a radically different message on Twitter: "Don't ever say that ISIS represents Islam."³⁷

4. Goals

As with Adan's motivation, his goals are extremely difficult to understand. We simply don't know what he hoped to accomplish from this attack.

5. Plans for violence

On September 17, 2016, Adan came home from his job as a security guard at an unnamed location and didn't remove his uniform. He told his family that he had work to do that evening. He lived with his father but his mother was also present when he left the house after apparently texting his boss that he wouldn't be coming in. However, it is not at all clear he actually had a job at the time—he may have been lying about it to his family. He had resigned from his position at Electrolux in June 2016, several months before the attack, and at least one source says he did not have a job at the time of the attack.³⁸ However, sources say he still had a uniform and wore it quite a bit. Moreover, a source reported Adan as telling his family "I have some work to do tonight." This could have been referring to a real or fake job or to the attack.³⁹

³³ Amy Forliti, "FBI still trying to establish motive in St. Cloud mall stabbing," *twincities.com*, February 17, 2017.

³⁴ Brooks et al., "Police show video of St. Cloud mall attacker's fatal encounter."

³⁵ Montemayor, "One year later, motive of St. Cloud mall attacker remains unclear."

³⁶ Jessica McBride, "Dahir Adan: 5 Fast Facts You Need to Know," *heavy.com*, September 18, 2016, updated: March 30, 2017.

³⁷ Montemayor, "One year later, motive of St. Cloud mall attacker remains unclear."

³⁸ Nadine Comerford and Alexander Smith, "Dahir Ahmed Adan Named by Police as St. Cloud, Minnesota, Stabbing Suspect," *nbcnews.com*, September 20, 2016.

³⁹ On having a job: Staff, "Officer, suspect ID'd in Crossroads stabbings," *scitimes.com*, September 17, 2016; Sterling et al., "Stabbing suspect had gone to mall to buy an iPhone, source says." On his odd quote to his family "FBI: Minnesota mall attacker became interested in Islam, withdrew from friends in months before attack," *chicagotribune.com*, October 6, 2016. On sometimes wearing his uniform at home: Pat Pfeifer, "FBI Probes Stabbing Attack as Terror Act," "Dahir Adan: What we know," *pressreader.com*, September 19, 2016. For statements about his plans for the night as well as his possible then-employment: Abigail Hauslohner and Drew Harwell, "An unassuming life before a suspect's rampage in a Minnesota mall,"

The last time he was seen by his family was about 6:00 or 6:30pm when he said he was going to the mall to buy an iPhone 7 before work.⁴⁰ He was in a good and joyful mood before heading to the mall, according to one community member. Contradictorily, two Somali community leaders in contact with the man's family earlier told CNN that Adan had been acting strangely before the incident⁴¹

At around 8:00pm, went to a SuperAmerica gas station where he may have purchased his knives. Eerily, as he left the store, he told the clerk, "You won't be seeing me again." The time between leaving his house and entering the gas station is unaccounted for. There are several possibilities. Among them, he could have been deciding if he truly wanted to commit the attack. In addition, he could have been trying to figure out the best target. He then drove back home, but on the way he hit a cyclist. The force was enough to shoot the rider over the hood of the car but Adan never stopped. Investigators later found the cyclist's glasses lodged on the car hood. There were reports from witnesses. The hit-and-run was only the beginning of what was to come and may have aggravated him. The business he had back at his house before going to the mall a few minutes away is unidentified. On the way to the mall from his house, Adan ran a red light before pulling into the Crossroad Mall's south parking lot at 8:13pm.⁴²

Adan, still wearing a private security company uniform, entered the mall with his two knives, one ten inches with a 5½ inch blade and the other nine inches with a 4½ inch blade. He stabbed 10 people after first asking some, but not all, of them if they were Muslim, and he was heard by at least 16 different people to yell "Allah Akbar." He also punched some people in the back, shoulder, head, neck, or face. Presumably, to punch people he put one of the knives inside his uniform, leaving one of his hands free.

Adan started the stabbings near Complete Nutrition, then proceeded to enter the mall and chased down the store employee at Ultimate Electronics and stabbed him. He then began to approach the Northwoods Candy Emporium, but the store employee was able to successfully pull down the chained security fence before Adan was able to slip in. Witnesses describe stabbing victims running inside the mall, alerting other shoppers to seek cover. Merchants closed their shops and locked their doors, and some shoppers slipped inside and hid with the employees.⁴³

Luckily, an off-duty police officer was also shopping. Jason Falconer is employed part-time at the nearby Avon Police Department. He had been the police chief in Albany, which is about 15 miles northwest of St. Cloud, and is the president and owner of a firing range and firearms training facility called Tactical

washingtonpost.com, September 19, 2016; Sterling et al., "Stabbing suspect had gone to mall to buy an iPhone, source says."

⁴⁰ "Minnesota stabbing: Dahir Ahmed Adam was known for calm demeanor." Staff, "Officer, suspect ID'd in Crossroads stabbings."

⁴¹ Sterling et al., "Stabbing suspect had gone to mall to buy an iPhone, source says."

⁴² Brooks et al., "Police show video of St. Cloud mall attacker's fatal encounter."

⁴³ Kendall, "Stearns County Attorney's Letter." Brief surveillance video can be found at Brooks et al., "Police show video of St. Cloud mall attacker's fatal encounter." These videos contain graphic images.

Advantage. He focuses on firearms and permit-to-carry training and also teaches “decision shooting” to law enforcement students at St. Cloud State University.⁴⁴ He was shopping in Bath & Body Works at the time of the stabbings. He was carrying a 9mm Glock with a 15 round magazine plus one in the chamber. Adan approached Falconer and asked him if he was a Muslim. Falconer replied “no.” Then, as Adan turned away, Falconer noticed two knives in his hands. Falconer drew his gun and ordered Adan to drop his weapons after announcing he was a police officer.

Adan fled toward Macy’s and ran down the main aisle. Falconer followed, gun drawn. Twelve witnesses verified that Falconer shouted at Adan several times to drop the weapons and identified himself as a police officer. Inside Macy’s, Adan lay down on the ground, knives still in his hands. Then he abruptly jumped up and charged Falconer, who proceeded to fire multiple times at Adan. After Adan fell down, Falconer commanded him to remain on the ground and told others around him he was an off-duty police officer, showing his badge as proof. But Adan was able to get up again and again charged at Falconer who then shot him several more times. According to reports, Adan initially faced Falconer then advanced toward him, his back to the bullets. He fell onto his stomach and crawled on his hands and knees toward Falconer with a knife still in his hand before finally falling down for good. He died shortly after. Falconer then proceeded to place himself between Adan and the open area of the mall. Adan was the only fatality. Falconer several times showed his badge to reassure shoppers who were frightened by the sight of a man in plain clothes who was pointing a gun at a man dressed as a security guard.⁴⁵

None of the eight men and two women who were stabbed suffered life-threatening injuries, and none remained hospitalized, officials said.⁴⁶ Responding to 95 calls from the mall, police arrived within four minutes.⁴⁷

One curious thing is that when Adan asked people if they were Muslim, he did not always attack them if they responded “no.” At least one person was stabbed when he replied “no.”⁴⁸ However, when Officer Falconer replied “no,” Adan just turned and walked away. So why did he ask people if they were Muslim if he didn’t stab all of them which had said no?

An autopsy performed on Adan showed he died of exsanguination (blood loss) stemming from 6 out of the 10 shots that hit him. A toxicology report showed the only substances in Adan’s body were nicotine, caffeine, and an anti-fungal medication.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ “Islamic State says Minnesota mall attacker was its soldier; his father IDs slain man as college student,” *latimes.com*, September 18, 2016. See also Doug Criss, “Jason Falconer: Man who ended Minnesota mall attack a reluctant hero,” *cnn.com*, September 19, 2016.

⁴⁵ Kendall, “Stearns County Attorney’s Letter.”

⁴⁶ New York Times, “Before St. Cloud mall attack, Dahir Adan seen as ‘normal American kid’” *twincities.com*, September 19, 2016.

⁴⁷ Kendall, “Stearns County Attorney’s Letter.”

⁴⁸ “Dahir Adan: What we know.”

⁴⁹ Kendall, “Stearns County Attorney’s Letter.”

The chaos was extensive. “One guy was bleeding from the side of his face,” said Sydney Weires, a college student who was inside the mall, adding that he was yelling at everyone to get out. A second shopper, Harley Exsted, said, “All of a sudden I heard pop pop pop. I thought someone tipped over a shelf. All of a sudden these people started running. I just saw everybody running our way.”⁵⁰ Another reported, “People came running around the corner and I freaked out because I thought it was a terrorist attack or something because I saw a lot of people, so I grabbed my kids. I ran as much as I could and I heard someone yell ‘Stop! Stop!’ As soon as the door shut I heard gunshots.” One man and his children were able to make it out of the mall, but his wife was trapped in the mall for hours.⁵¹ Tami Dung, who owns Nails Sophisticates at the mall, was busy cleaning up when she saw police cars lining up outside the center and only heard what had happened after she got home: “I was so scared to be too close.” Another said she felt safe in St. Cloud until Saturday’s events: “It is beyond scary,” she said. “My kids were here.”⁵² One man was outside the mall where his wife was employed as a manager at Clinique in Macy’s: “She called me on the phone and told me she was hiding under the counter with a customer.” He later heard from her, saying she was safe. He remained outside and was able to have a visual of her just to make sure she was safe.⁵³

The next night police executed search warrants for two apartments, including the one where Adan lived with his father, and seized photos and other materials. They also impounded the assailant’s car from the mall parking lot. What exactly they found from the searches is unknown.

Soon after the attack, the FBI’s Joint Terrorism Task Force took charge with assistance from the St. Cloud officials.⁵⁴

6. Role of informants

There were no informants in this case.

7. Connections

There were no connections. Typical of their agenda, the Islamic State said Adan was a solider for them. Amaq, the official news agency for the Islamic State, stated, “The executor of the stabbing attacks in Minnesota yesterday was a soldier of the Islamic State and carried out the operation in response to calls to target the citizens of countries belonging to the crusader coalition.”⁵⁵ But there is absolutely no evidence that the group had any role. And there were no indirect connections, either. Often in cases like this, there is some indirect linkage or

⁵⁰ Mitch Smith, “F.B.I. Treats Minnesota Mall Stabbing Attack as ‘Potential Act of Terrorism’,” *nytimes.com*, September 18, 2016.

⁵¹ Merrit Kennedy, “Mass Stabbing Attack in Minnesota Mall Injures At Least 9 People,” *npr.org*, September 18, 2016.

⁵² Stahl et al., “Family ID’s attacker.”

⁵³ “Suspect killed after a stabbing attack in Minnesota mall,” *nypost.com*, September 18, 2016.

⁵⁴ Matt Sepic, “FBI takes lead on St. Cloud mall stabbing investigation,” *mprnews.com*, September 20, 2016.

⁵⁵ Volz and Dobuzinskis, “Islamic State claims responsibility for Minnesota mall attack.”

influence, usually through the viewing foreign terrorist propaganda or the like. But there was nothing in this case.

8. Relation to the Muslim community

Muhayadin Mohamed, president of the Islamic Center of St. Cloud, said he didn't know Adan personally but does know his father and some of his siblings: "I haven't seen him coming to the mosque. He wasn't a student of ours. He was not a regular mosque comer, who normally comes to the five daily prayers." Mohamed, the neighbor, agreed. "Of course, most Somalis are Muslims," he said. "But this guy was a typical American. He was just busy with school and work. He didn't use to go to the mosque. So, it's impossible that he turned an extremist."

In public meetings, at rallies and press conferences, Somali-American leaders stressed that this was the act of an individual, not of a community. But some fear that this one incident, and the taint of terrorism that was linked to St. Cloud's Somali-American community by the ISIS statement, could undo years of community-building. Haji Yussuf, a director of #UniteCloud, an organization that launched almost two years ago with the aim of easing racial tensions in the region, said, "There have been people for 30 years that have been working to build relationships across cultures and religion and all issues for this town. So after this one incident, that's a little bit shattered. It's like a glass that is shattered. It's not broken. We're trying to see where we can rescue and fix that." Natalie Ringsmuth, another director of #UniteCloud, said, "In some ways, people who have lived in the St. Cloud area for generations tend to keep among their own. That can make conversations between groups difficult. Choosing peace in this area means choosing to get to know your neighbors. What we're hoping is that we don't lose ground in that area now, and that instead it makes people more willing to do that."⁵⁶

Members of the Somali American community began to get anti-immigrant and Islamophobic messages directed toward them online. A leader of the community, Abdul Kalane, said, "When I heard that the guy who did this was a member of the Somali community, I was so devastated, because I know what's going to happen. The repercussions, the retaliation. I was shocked, because the guy lives in the same building I live in. And even though we don't know the full picture, we are actually devastated by this. It's really tragic."

Activist Lul Hersi said she had feared for her one of her sons when she heard about the attack, and was relieved when he arrived home that night. She called it a "dark day" that the community would never forget: "We condemn the acts of yesterday. It was an individual and we don't know what motivated that individual. Let's unite as one Minnesota. Let's take love instead of hate."

Jaylani Hussein, the executive director for the Minnesota chapter of the Council of American-Islamic Relations, noted that central Minnesota has a history of anti-Muslim organizing. Visits by well-known anti-Muslim speakers and a recent billboard, eventually removed, that read "Catholic Charities Resettles Islamists, Evil or Insanity," are pieces of evidence he cites. He elaborated, "It's

⁵⁶ Cox and Collins, "After a week, more questions, few answers in St. Cloud mall attack."

not just random people being upset and acting randomly. This is people who actually organize, who hold events, who hold meetings, who fundraise. They make sure everyone in their community is aware of what is going on. There is tension, there is real concern, and this incident just magnifies everything that has happened here. But we hope, even this big of an incident can bring St Cloud residents who have not played a role in this discussion to start to take back the narrative from the extremes.”⁵⁷

9. Depiction by the authorities

Chief Anderson declined to call this terrorism, saying that he wanted to wait for a motive to become clear. He also said the attack inspired a successful bid to the city for additional funds for training.⁵⁸ Minnesota FBI spokesman Kyle Loven also declined to say if investigators believed the attack to be terrorism.⁵⁹ However, when the FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force joined the investigation it gave the impression that FBI was treating this to be an act of terror. In line with this thinking, Special Agent in Charge Rick Thornton said the FBI considered the attack a “potential act of terrorism.”⁶⁰

FBI Director James Comey said Adan appeared to have been at least partially inspired by radical extremist ideology. When testifying before the House Judiciary Committee in Washington, Comey was asked whether authorities had confirmed that the attack was an act of terrorism. Comey responded that the FBI is “still working on it,” but that Adan appeared to have been motivated “by some sort of inspiration from radical Islamic groups.” Minneapolis FBI spokesman Jeff Van Nest declined to elaborate on Comey’s comments. He said he’d let the FBI director’s statement speak for itself.⁶¹ There seems to be no evidence to back up Director Comey’s assertion.

Minnesota leaders, at the local, state, and federal levels, all weighed in. St. Cloud mayor Dave Kleis assured the public that Officer Falconer was in the right by killing Adan. While having the surveillance video on hand, he pointed out the officers’ life was in danger.⁶² Minnesota Governor Mark Dayton said he was “Appalled at the terrible attacks on innocent Minnesotans in St. Cloud last night. If true that they were motivated by religious bigotry, I condemn them even more strongly. ... I ask everyone in the St. Cloud area and throughout Minnesota to rise above this atrocity and act to make religious and racial tolerance one of the ways in which Minnesotans again lead our country.” Governor Dayton visited the town shortly after to show his solidarity with the victims.⁶³

Tom Emmer, US Representative whose district includes St. Cloud, said, “The person who attacked innocent people at the Crossroads Mall in St. Cloud last night struck terror into the hearts of all Americans. Our thoughts and prayers

⁵⁷ Goyette, “Minnesota’s Somali leaders condemn stabbing as report identifies suspect.”

⁵⁸ Montemayor, “One year later, motive of St. Cloud mall attacker remains unclear.”

⁵⁹ “Officer, suspect ID’d in Crossroads stabbings.”

⁶⁰ Sepic, “FBI takes lead on St. Cloud mall stabbing investigation.”

⁶¹ “FBI head: Extremism apparent influence in St. Cloud mall attack,” mprnews.com, September 28, 2016.

⁶² Stahl et al., “Family ID’s attacker.”

⁶³ Stahl et al., “Family ID’s attacker.”

are with the victims of this attack and we hope for their speedy recovery...The safety of our citizens is our number one concern. I also urge the Senate to support and pass The SAFE Act, which the House passed last year, which would strengthen security checks on those entering our country..."

Minnesota US Senator Amy Klobuchar said, "Everyone should feel safe in their community — whether they're at school or a movie theater or a shopping mall...While we will learn more about the facts surrounding this horrific attack today, one thing we know for certain this morning: Due to the courageous actions of an off-duty area police officer, the good work of first responders, and the reaction of those present at the mall, lives were saved."

In a statement, Minnesota State House Speaker Kurt Daudt preached: "First and foremost my prayers are with victims and their recovery...Officer Falconer's quick actions saved lives and prevented additional injuries, and we are grateful for his heroism...As state leaders, it is our responsibility and my commitment to do everything we can to keep our communities safe."

Finally, Minnesota State Representatives Jim Knoblach and Tama Theis, both from St. Cloud, issued a joint statement: "We ask the St. Cloud community to join us in praying for the victims of last night's tragic attack in St. Cloud. We are thankful for the officer whose heroic actions saved lives and prevented further injuries, and to all the law enforcement and emergency responders for their good work as well."⁶⁴

Hillary Clinton, then the Democratic Presidential candidate, said she was briefed on this crisis, as well as the one in New York and New Jersey (Case 87) which happened on the same day.⁶⁵

10. Coverage by the media

News outlets generally used phrases like "stabbing attack" or "mall attack" to describe the event. If "terrorist" was used, it was generally used when explaining how the FBI was moving forward in their investigation treating it like a terrorist attack.

Thomas Joscelyn, a senior fellow at the neoconservative Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD) had bit of a different take. He said the circumstances surrounding ISIS claiming Adan's attack has him wondering: "Is there part of the picture we're still not seeing? I don't think we can make a sweeping generalization of what they claim and don't claim. More often than not there's some sort of definitive connection, whether it's inspired, guided or some sort of real-world connection."⁶⁶ Since there was no evidence of any kind of inspiration stemming from ISIS (or from any other group), this claim by Joscelyn seemed to be slightly premature. Moreover, FDD has been heavily criticized in

⁶⁴ "Dayton, Emmer and other leaders react to St. Cloud mall stabbing," twincities.com, September 18, 2016.

⁶⁵ Stahl et al., "Family ID's attacker."

⁶⁶ Montemayor, "One year later, motive of St. Cloud mall attacker remains unclear."

the past for their intense leanings toward a militaristic policy, especially those policies aimed at Iran and the War on Terror, and the Middle East overall.⁶⁷

11. Policing costs

The policing costs in the crisis are very low. There was no prior investigation, and there were no costs associated with courts, jails, surveillance, etc.

12. Relevance of the internet

In a case like this, with no revelation of motivations or goals, it's almost impossible to establish the relevance of the internet. FBI Special Agent in Charge Thornton in Minnesota did suggest that Adan was "radicalized overnight". Curiously, however, there seems to be little, if any, evidence he was radicalized at all.

13. Are we safer?

In a case like this, with no apparent motivations or goals, it is difficult to say whether we're safer or not. And it's difficult as well to try to stop incidents like this from happening if we have absolutely no idea why they did it or what their endgame was.

14. Conclusions

What can we conclude from this case? I find two conclusions. First, we cannot definitively say that this was terrorism at all. Adan was heard asking people if they were Muslim and heard shouting "Allah Akbar." But this, in and of itself, is not enough. It may be that he radicalized overnight for some undisclosed reason and/or that he just snapped because of some incident we don't know about. There isn't much more which can be concluded from this case.

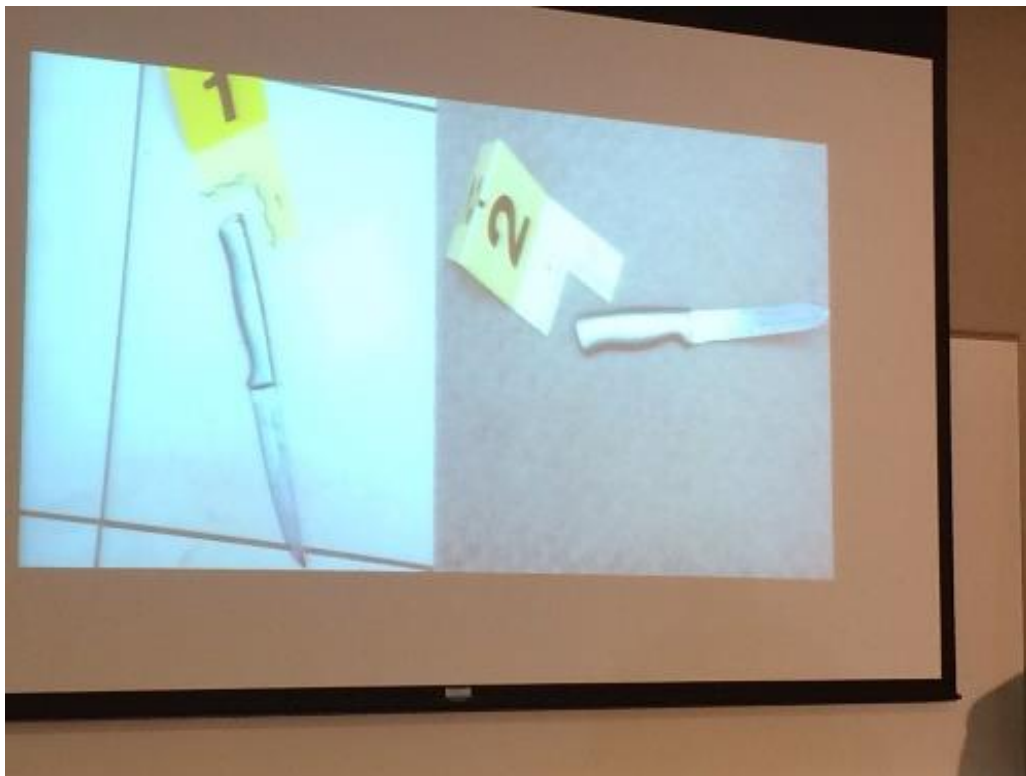
Second, this case can be compared to the Las Vegas shooting on October 1, 2017, when Stephen Paddock, a millionaire real estate investor opened fire on a heavily crowded Route 91 Harvest music festival while Jason Aldean was performing on the Las Vegas Strip. He was perched on the 32nd floor of the Mandalay Bay Hotel across the street. He killed 58 and injured 546 and then committed suicide with a shot to the head. This is the most deadly mass shooting in United States history. With a rampage as horrific and massive as this one, one would think a motivation and endgame would be relatively easy to find. But investigators have found nothing in terms of motivations or goals: the interviews they have performed and the evidence they have amassed have led them nowhere.⁶⁸ It is similar in that way with the Minnesota case.

⁶⁷ For the main critique, see "Foundation for Defense of Democracies," Institute for Policy Studies, November 16, 2011. See also Eli Clifton, "EXCLUSIVE: Documents Shed Light on Those Underwriting the Foundation for Defense of Democracies," thinkprogress.org, July 19, 2011.

⁶⁸ For more information on the Las Vegas shooting, see (among many others) Stefan Becket, "More Details Revealed about Las Vegas Shooter's Arsenal of Weapons," cbsnews.com, October 4, 2017; Rachel Crosby, Henry Brean, Anita Hassan, Jamie Munks and Jessie Bekker, "It was a

Appendix:

These are the knives Adan used in the attack.⁶⁹



horror show': Mass shooting leaves at least 59 dead, 527 wounded on Las Vegas Strip," lasvegasreviewjournal.com, October 3, 2017.

⁶⁹ "Mall terrorist was newly interested in Islam, used steak knives during attack, FBI says."