

Case 45: Abdo

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In 2009, Naser Jason Abdo, an American citizen who had recently converted to Islam, joined the U.S. Army which was then deep in wars both in Iraq and Afghanistan. He claimed he joined because at the time he felt it was the best way he could defend the rights of Muslims in places like that. However, notes Nicole Spaetzle, he had no other job prospects.

The next year, as he was about to be deployed to Afghanistan, he applied for conscientious objector status because of his opposition to those wars in which Muslims were the prime casualties and because of harassment he felt he had undergone in the Army because he was a Muslim.

Raised in a home that was “broken and abusive,” he was a loner and described as friendless and “weird.” None of these qualities seemed to improve when he joined the Army, and after some consideration, the Army decided to accept his application and to discharge (i.e. get rid of) him. However, this action was delayed when child pornography was found on his government-issued computer.

This experience set Abdo off. Insisting that someone in the Army had placed the pornography there (and perhaps especially sensitive on the issue because his father had once been arrested for soliciting sex with a minor on the internet), Abdo went AWOL, plotted to kidnap one of his commanding officers and then murder him on video, failed to buy a gun because of his “alarming behavior” in a gun shop, and then took off for Fort Hood, Texas, where another Muslim in the Army, Major Nidal Hasan had killed 13 in 2009 (Case 32). There he planned to outdo Hasan by setting off a homemade bomb like those used in the Boston Marathon bombing (Case 53) at a restaurant popular with soldiers, gunning down people fleeing the explosion, and then dying in a shoot-out with police.

Whether by plan or happenstance, Abdo bought gunpowder and bullets at Guns Galore in Killeen, Texas, the same store that had been used by Hasan—who, in contrast to Abdo, had joined the military *before* the US became involved in wars in the Middle East. Abdo’s demeanor in the store and the fact that he seemed to be buying a great amount of explosive material while asking naïve questions about how to use it, alerted the clerk who then called the police. They arrested Abdo in his motel room on July 27, 2011, and he was soon vehemently confessing all.

Forced to wear a surgical mask at his trial to keep him from spitting blood at officers, the defiant, unrepentant, and clearly dangerous Abdo was sentenced to two consecutive life sentences in prison plus sixty years with no chance of parole.

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Nicole Spaetzel

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1. Overview

After going AWOL from the United States Army's Fort Campbell, Kentucky and battling accusations that he possessed child pornography, United States Army Private First Class Naser Jason Abdo was arrested on July 27, 2011 in Killeen, Texas for plotting to bomb a restaurant near Fort Hood. After his arrest Abdo, who is a Muslim, confessed that he planned the attacks because he opposed the United States War in Afghanistan and felt it was his duty to help fight the Holy War.¹ Abdo was twenty-one years old at the time of his arrest and had been in the Army for two years. Abdo was set to deploy to Afghanistan in June of 2010 but he applied for discharge as a conscientious objector to the war because he was a Muslim.² He had been an actively practicing Muslim since he was seventeen.

Abdo filed his conscientious objector application in June 2010. The Army's Conscientious Objector Review board initially denied his request, but the deputy assistant secretary of the Army Review Boards Agency stepped in and recommended he be granted status as a conscientious objector.³ His discharge was delayed when he was charged with possession of child pornography on May 13, 2011. The Army discovered the images on Abdo's government issued computer. They recommended that he face a court martial for the charges. Abdo denied the charges and insisted they he was set up by the Army because of his religion.

Abdo went AWOL from Fort Campbell over the Fourth of July weekend in 2011. Abdo planned to kidnap an officer from Fort Campbell.⁴ After Fort Campbell officials learned Abdo was visiting gun stores, he left Kentucky and traveled to Killeen, Texas.⁵ In Texas, Abdo planned to attack a local restaurant and secured ammunition and bomb supplies.

Law enforcement was tipped off that Abdo was a potential threat by the clerk of Guns Galore near the Fort Hood restaurant that Abdo planned to attack. The clerk at the gun store became suspicious by the amount of smokeless gunpowder and ammunition that Abdo purchased. The clerk was also suspicious because the Guns Galore store is the same place where Major Nidal Malik Hasan bought the weapons and ammunition that he used to attack Fort Hood in 2009.⁶ The tip from the guns store clerk and information from a taxi driver helped law

¹ "AWOL Soldier Gets Life Term for Fort Hood Plot," *NY Daily News*, August 10, 2012.

² Manny Fernandez and James Dao, "Soldier Arrested in Suspected Bomb Plot Had Series of Disputes with Army," *New York Times* July 29, 2011.

³ Jamie Stengle, "Naser Abdo Confession: AWOL Soldier Admits To Fort Hood Attack Plan: Army," *Huffington Post*. July 28, 2011.

⁴ "Abdo Planned to Kidnap, Kill Campbell Official" *Army Times*. A Gannett Company, November 22, 2011.

⁵ "Abdo Planned to Kidnap, Kill Campbell Official."

⁶ Rhonda Schwartz, Pierre Thomas, and Martha Radditz, "Fort Hood Suspect Mentions Al Qaeda Cleric Believed to Have Inspired Previous Attack, Official Says," *ABC News*. ABC News Network, July 28, 2011.

enforcement agents track Abdo to a motel room in the Fort Hood area. They discovered his hotel room full of “possible bomb-making materials,”⁷ including ammunition, gunpowder, weapons and a book tutorial for bomb making.⁸ After questioning Abdo, authorities were able to rule out any suspicious that he was working with others. Abdo also admitted to authorities that his aim was to kill soldiers.⁹

Following his arrest, Abdo was charged with attempted use of a weapon of mass destruction, attempted murder of federal employees and weapons charges for his possession of an illegal firearm.¹⁰ He was convicted of all charges in Federal Court on May 24, 2012.¹¹ He was sentenced on August 10, 2012 to two consecutive life sentences in prison plus sixty years with no chance of parole.¹² On August 19, 2013 the US 5th Circuit Court rejected his appeal and upheld his 2012 conviction.¹³ Abdo is currently serving his prison sentence in ADX Florence maximum-security prison in Colorado.¹⁴

2. Nature of the adversary

Naser Jason Abdo was born in Garland Texas to Jamal Rateb Abdo and Carlisa Morlan.¹⁵ His father was a Muslim immigrant from Jordan and his mother was a natural born American citizen and Christian. Together they had Naser Jason and one younger daughter. When Abdo was three years old his parents divorced. After the divorce, he and his younger sister continued living with their father in Texas.¹⁶ Their mother was suffering from substance abuse, and left her children with their father while she sought help with her addiction.¹⁷

When Abdo was fourteen, his father was arrested for soliciting sex to a minor on the internet. The minor was actually a Garland, Texas detective looking for sexual predators on the internet by posing as a fifteen year old.¹⁸ His relationship with the fifteen-year-old “Molly” started online as early as 2002, but Jamal Rateb Abdo’s arrest did not come until 2004 when he went to an apartment complex where he believed he was meeting Molly. He served five years in prison and upon his release in 2009, he was deported back to Jordan.¹⁹ After his father’s

⁷ Elyse Siegel, “Naser Jason Abdo Arrested Near Fort Hood with Possible ‘Bomb-Making Materials,’” *TheHuffingtonPost.com*, July 28, 2011.

⁸ Stengel, “Naser Abdo Confession.”

⁹ Phillip Janowski, “Judge Rules Abdo’s Confession Admissible,” *Killeen Daily Herald*, April 22, 2012.

¹⁰ Siegel, “Naser Jason Abdo Arrested Near Fort Hood With Possible ‘Bomb-Making Materials’”

¹¹ Post Staff Report, “Fort Hood Bomb Plotter Found Guilty on All Charges,” *New York Post* May 24 2012.

¹² Luke Johnson, “Naser Jason Abdo Sentenced To Life for Fort Hood Plot,” *TheHuffingtonPost.com*, August 10, 2012.

¹³ Sarah Rafique, “Court Rejects Abdo’s Appeal,” *Killeen Daily Herald*, August 20, 2013.

¹⁴ “Inmate Locator,” *Federal Bureau of Prisons*, U.S. Department of Justice.

¹⁵ “Naser Jason Abdo,” *Wikipedia.com*, Wikimedia Foundation, July 8, 2013.

¹⁶ Fernandez, “Soldier Arrested in Suspected Bomb Plot Had Series of Disputes with Army.”

¹⁷ “Terror Suspect Grew Up in Broken North Texas Home,” *KDFW Fox 4*, Fox Television Stations, July 29, 2011.

¹⁸ Fernandez, “Soldier Arrested in Suspected Bomb Plot Had Series of Disputes With Army.”

¹⁹ Fernandez, “Soldier Arrested in Suspected Bomb Plot Had Series of Disputes With Army.”

arrest, Abdo and his sister moved-in with their mother, and the family stayed in Garland, Texas.²⁰

Abdo attended elementary through high school in Garland, Texas.²¹ Neighbors and residents of the town were familiar with Abdo as a child and young adult. They recalled his childhood home with his father as “broken and abusive.”²² One neighbor remembered him as quiet and lonely.²³ Another said that you could tell he was trying to make the best of his broken family life and troubled childhood.²⁴ Many neighbors and residents pitied Abdo as a child, but few said they were surprised when Abdo was arrested for his terror plot to bomb a restaurant in Killeen, Texas.²⁵ A friend of Abdo’s younger sister that attended high school with Abdo remembered him as, “weird,” and that he, “didn’t fit in.”²⁶ She said he always stayed in his room while she was over. She remembered that Abdo was lonely and had no friends while his sister was very popular.²⁷

Abdo did not officially become a Muslim until he was seventeen although he spent the majority of his adolescent years around his Muslim father. Two years later, in March of 2009, Abdo joined the Army, reportedly because at the time he felt it was the best way he could defend the rights of Muslims in other countries, namely Iraq and Afghanistan.²⁸ However, he had no other job prospects.²⁹ Thus, Abdo joined the United States Army not as an American citizen looking to protect the freedom of his country, but as a Muslim trying to do what was right for his religion.

His short time in the military was plagued with conflict and harassment. Abdo complained that he endured harassment from his fellow service members because he was a Muslim serving in the United States Army and that he was unable to fast appropriately or to say his necessary prayers five times a day.³⁰ He used these obstacles and harassments as reasons to question his ability to serve in the United States Army as a Muslim. In June of 2010, when his troop was scheduled to deploy for Afghanistan, he decided to leave the military as a conscientious objector. He could not bring himself to fight in what he believed to be an “unjust war” as a Muslim.³¹ Abdo had joined the Army because of his religion and left because of it too. Clearly, Abdo’s identification as a Muslim was very important to him.

Abdo went to the media to draw attention to his struggle to be discharged from the military. He held a news conference in October 2010 in New York sponsored by Iraq Veterans against the War where he warned against America’s

²⁰ Stengle, “Naser Abdo Confession.”

²¹ Fernandez, “Soldier Arrested in Suspected Bomb Plot Had Series of Disputes with Army.”

²² “Terror Suspect Grew Up in Broken North Texas Home.”

²³ “Terror Suspect Grew Up in Broken North Texas Home.”

²⁴ “Terror Suspect Grew Up in Broken North Texas Home.”

²⁵ “Terror Suspect Grew Up in Broken North Texas Home.”

²⁶ Stengle, “Naser Abdo Confession.”

²⁷ Stengle, “Naser Abdo Confession.”

²⁸ Sarah Netter, “Devout Muslim Soldier Hopes to Avoid Deployment to Afghanistan,” *ABC News*, ABC News Network, August 31, 2010.

²⁹ Fernandez, “Soldier Arrested in Suspected Bomb Plot Had Series of Disputes with Army.”

³⁰ Fernandez, “Soldier Arrested in Suspected Bomb Plot Had Series of Disputes with Army.”

³¹ Netter, “Devout Muslim Soldier Hopes to Avoid Deployment to Afghanistan.”

association of terror with Muslims.³² He participated in a number of interviews with different news sources.

In the midst of his very public fight to be discharged as conscientious objector, Abdo began openly to denounce America's involvement in the war. He also made a trip to New York City in September of 2010 to attend an anti-war vigil in support of Pfc. Bradley Manning, the alleged source of the WikiLeaks that released classified United States war documents.³³ The Army also investigated Abdo for making anti-American comments during a language class he was taking at the Fort Campbell Base. His remarks were left unspecified by the Army investigators and they felt that they did not have evidence to suggest Abdo was planning an attack.³⁴

While there were no specific dates listed, it was reported that the Army's Conscientious Objector Review board initially denied his request, but the deputy assistant secretary of the Army Review Boards Agency stepped in and recommended he be granted status as a conscientious objector.³⁵ However, shortly after his application was accepted, the Army reported that they found thirty-four images of child pornography on Abdo's government issued computer. The Army charged Abdo on May 13, 2011.³⁶ The discovery caused Abdo's previously granted status as a conscientious objector to be delayed until after this court martial. He immediately accused the Army of putting the child pornography on his computer in order to continue to persecute him because of his religion.³⁷

3. Motivation

The child pornography accusations set off the series of events that led to Abdo's eventual arrest for plotting to bomb a restaurant near Fort Hood and gun down any survivors. Abdo felt that the army had set him up because he was a Muslim applying for conscientious objector status. He denied having child pornography on his government issued computer and insisted the Army placed it there.³⁸ Shortly thereafter, Abdo went AWOL from Fort Campbell. What followed was a series of events that revealed his true character and culminated with his arrest in Killeen, Texas.

In order to retaliate against the Army for placing the pornography on his computer, Abdo planned to kidnap one of his commanding officers from Fort Campbell.³⁹ He planned to execute the officer on video.⁴⁰ He bought a cattle prod, a shovel and handcuffs. His plan was interrupted when Army officials discovered he was visiting gun stores near Fort Campbell: Abdo attempted to

³² Charles Hoskinson, "Naser J. Abdo Arrested in Possible Ft. Hood Attack Plot," *POLITICO*, July 28, 2011.

³³ Levine, "AWOL Soldier Arrested in What Police Say Was New Fort Hood Terror Plot."

³⁴ Stengle, "Naser Abdo Confession."

³⁵ Stengle, "Naser Abdo Confession."

³⁶ Stengle, "Naser Abdo Confession."

³⁷ Johnson, "Naser Jason Abdo Sentenced To Life For Fort Hood Plot."

³⁸ Johnson, "Naser Jason Abdo Sentenced To Life For Fort Hood Plot."

³⁹ Janowski, "Judge Rules Abdo's Confession Admissible."

⁴⁰ "Abdo Planned to Kidnap, Kill Campbell Official."

purchase a gun from Quantico Tactical near the base on July 3, 2011.⁴¹ The gun storeowner said that Abdo visited the store twice that day. The owner did not comment on specifics but said that, “He exhibited behavior that alerted our staff and our staff refused to, based upon that behavior, sell him a firearm.”⁴² Once Abdo failed to purchase the handgun and knew the Army was catching on to his plan, he ditched the supplies in a trash can and left town.⁴³

He now shifted his attention to Fort Hood. Abdo felt that the United States Army had wronged Muslims, including him. He felt he needed to defend Muslims everywhere. He viewed the Army as the enemy because they were fighting abroad in Iraq and Afghanistan and putting the lives of Muslims in danger. He had originally joined the Army because he thought it was the best way to defend the rights of Muslims in those countries.⁴⁴ When his troop was scheduled to deploy to Afghanistan, he felt he was no longer serving to protect the rights of Muslims. Thus, he applied for conscientious objector status.⁴⁵ Abdo told media during his battle to earn status as a conscientious objector, “A Muslim is not allowed to participate in an unjust war by Islamic standards. Any Muslim who knows his religion or maybe takes into account what his religion says can find out very clearly why he should not participate in the U.S. military.”⁴⁶

A few years before him, another Muslim American soldier felt the same way about fighting in Afghanistan (see Case 32). Major Nidal Hasan is responsible for the mass shooting at Fort Hood in Killeen, Texas, on November 5, 2009.⁴⁷ The shooting killed thirteen people and injured more than thirty others.⁴⁸ Law enforcement determined that Hasan acted alone and was not affiliated with any terrorist cell. Hasan was a psychiatrist working at Fort Hood when he carried out the mass shooting.⁴⁹ After the shooting, Hasan was hailed a hero by many Islamic extremist groups including al-Qaeda.⁵⁰

Abdo had originally condemned the Fort Hood shooting when it happened in 2009, but by the time of his trial in 2012, Abdo was screaming out Hasan’s name as his “brother.”⁵¹ By 2012, Abdo had completely changed his opinions on the United States Army and no longer believed they were defending innocent Muslims by fighting, but were instead responsible for threatening the freedoms and rights of innocent Muslims in Islamic countries like Iraq and Afghanistan.

Abdo did not just call Hasan his “brother,” but also confessed that he was motivated to “outdo” Hasan with his terror plot. Without much examination, it is

⁴¹ Stengle, “Naser Abdo Confession.”

⁴² Stengle, “Naser Abdo Confession.”

⁴³ “Abdo Planned to Kidnap, Kill Campbell Official.”

⁴⁴ Netter, “Devout Muslim Soldier Hopes to Avoid Deployment to Afghanistan.”

⁴⁵ Brad Knickerbocker, “Another Fort Hood Terror Plot? Army Pfc. Naser Abdo Arrested,”

Christian Science Monitor, July 28, 2011.

⁴⁶ Netter, “Devout Muslim Soldier Hopes to Avoid Deployment to Afghanistan.”

⁴⁷ Robert McFadden, “Army Doctor Held in Fort Hood Rampage,” *New York Times*, November 5, 2009.

⁴⁸ “Soldier Opens Fire at Ft. Hood; 13 Dead,” *CBSNews.com*, November 5, 2009.

⁴⁹ Hasan has since been dishonorably discharged from the Army.

⁵⁰ Richard Esposito, Matthew Cole, and Brian Ross, “Officials: U.S. Army Told of Hasan’s Contacts with Al Qaeda,” *ABC News*, ABC News Network, November 9, 2009.

⁵¹ “AWOL Soldier Gets Life Term for Fort Hood Plot.”

easy to see similarities between Hasan's Fort Hood Shooting and Abdo's Fort Hood Terror Plot. Abdo set the scene for his attack near Fort Hood and targeted Fort Hood soldiers just like Hasan. Hasan was a soldier stationed at Fort Hood at the time of his attack, and Abdo bought a Fort Hood uniform to wear during his attack.⁵² Abdo had a pistol in his possession, which he intended to use to shoot survivors.⁵³ Hasan used a pistol in his shooting rampage at Fort Hood in 2009.⁵⁴ Abdo admitted that he would, "lived in Hasan's shadow despite efforts to outdo him."⁵⁵ Abdo planned to outdo Hasan by placing the bomb in addition to using the firearm.

4. Goals

Abdo had two main goals: to be a good Muslim and to bring justice to the United States Army for wronging Muslims. During Abdo's time in the Army, he felt that he had lost sight of his religion and needed to redeem himself. He cited not having enough time for daily prayer and not being able to fast as two grievances that prevented him from being, what he considered, a good Muslim while serving in the Army.⁵⁶

On top of redeeming himself in the eyes of Allah, Abdo also felt that the United States Military had wronged Muslims, including him, and there needed to be justice. Abdo had applied for status in the military as a conscientious objector so he would not be deployed to Afghanistan and be forced to kill fellow Muslims.

Abdo was not the only Muslim that the United States Army had wronged. During his trial, Abdo called out the name, "Abeer Quassim al Janvi."⁵⁷ Al Janvi was a fourteen-year-old girl raped in Iraq by soldiers from the 101st Airborne Division out of Fort Campbell in 2006. Abdo was assigned to his division when he entered in the Army in 2009. More generally, Abdo denounced the Army for taking the lives of innocent Muslims while they fought in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Abdo believed that martyrdom was the only way to achieve justice and freedom.⁵⁸ Similarly, a man that dies a martyr, or Shahid, in the name of Allah or his religion, is held in the highest regard.⁵⁹ Abdo's ultimate goal to die a martyr was meant to ensure his place as a good Muslim and his path to martyrdom, placing two bombs in a Killeen, Texas restaurant, shooting survivors and dying in a shootout with police, would ensure justice was served.

Abdo saw the 2009 Fort Hood Shooter, Nadil Malik Hasan as an example of a good Muslim that succeeded in bringing justice to the United States Army for

⁵² David J. Goodman, "Solider Held Amid Terror Plot at Fort Hood," NYTimes.com, July 28, 2011.

⁵³ Jeremy Schwartz, "AWOL Soldier Planned to Bomb Killeen Restaurant, Then Shoot Survivors, FBI Agent Testifies," Statesman.com, May 22, 2012.

⁵⁴ Pierre Thomas, and Jason Ryan, "Alleged Fort Hood Shooter Bought Gun, Despite Ongoing Terrorism Investigation," ABC News, ABC News Network, November 11, 2009.

⁵⁵ "AWOL Soldier Gets Life Term for Fort Hood Plot."

⁵⁶ Fernandez, "Soldier Arrested in Suspected Bomb Plot Had Series of Disputes with Army."

⁵⁷ Alex Johnson, "Belligerent Fort Hood Suspect Denounces Military," NBCNews.com, July 29, 2011.

⁵⁸ "Abdo Planned to Kidnap, Kill Campbell Official."

⁵⁹ Ezzati, "The Concept of Martyrdom in Islam," Al-Islam.org.

trying to deploy him to Afghanistan where he would have to kill fellow Muslims. Abdo structured his plans for violence similarly to Hasan's but with the goal of outshining Hasan. In Abdo's eyes, if he could outperform Hasan's attack, then Abdo would be a better Muslim and better at making the Army face justice. After Abdo was arrested, he admitted he was trying to outdo Hasan but failed and will forever live in his shadow.⁶⁰

5. Plans for violence

At a press conference following the arrest of Abdo, police alluded to the severity of the terror plot by telling the media, "We would probably be here today giving you a different briefing had he not been stopped."⁶¹ Dressed in a Fort Hood Army uniform, Abdo planned to place a bomb in a restaurant in Killeen, Texas that was popular among soldiers from the nearby Fort Hood. After the bomb had detonated, he planned to gun down any survivors that exited the restaurant. His ultimate plan was to engage in a shoot-out with police and die a martyr for Muslims. Abdo had acquired all of his necessary supplies and was building the bomb in a Killeen, Texas motel room when police apprehended him.

Abdo's original plan was to capture an officer from Fort Campbell and execute the soldier on video.⁶² He bought a cattle prod, a shovel and handcuffs. His plan was interrupted when Army officials discovered he was visiting gun stores near Fort Campbell. Abdo attempted to purchase a gun from Quantico Tactical near the base on July 3, 2011.⁶³ The gun storeowner said that Abdo visited the store twice that day. The store staff refused to sell him a handgun because of his alarming behavior. Once Abdo failed to purchase the handgun, he ditched the supplies in a trashcan and left town.⁶⁴ Abdo then went AWOL from Fort Campbell. There is no indication of Abdo's specific travels from Kentucky to Texas between July 3, 2011 and his arrest on July 27, 2011. His hometown of Garland, Texas is only about one hundred-seventy miles from Fort Hood so he would be familiar with the area.⁶⁵ Once in Texas, He checked himself into a motel room near the restaurant where he planned to place his bomb.

Abdo purchased a Fort Hood Uniform from an Army Surplus Store near Killeen.⁶⁶ Abdo had no plans of attempting to enter the base because he knew it would be a near impossible task because of heightened security and his AWOL status.⁶⁷ Instead, he planned to use the uniform to blend in with the soldiers at the restaurant. He also wore a Fort Hood uniform to achieve his goal of following closely in the footsteps of the 2009 Fort Hood shooter, Nadil Malik Hasan. Abdo worked to have an obvious connection to the violence Hasan caused to defend Islam, but Abdo also wanted to outdo Hasan.

⁶⁰ "AWOL Soldier Gets Life Term for Fort Hood Plot."

⁶¹ Mike Levine, "AWOL Soldier Arrested in What Police Say Was New Fort Hood Terror Plot." *Fox News*. FOX News Network, July 28, 2011.

⁶² "Abdo Planned to Kidnap, Kill Campbell Official."

⁶³ Stengle, "Naser Abdo Confession."

⁶⁴ "Abdo Planned to Kidnap, Kill Campbell Official."

⁶⁵ Fernandez, "Soldier Arrested in Suspected Bomb Plot Had Series of Disputes With Army."

⁶⁶ Hoskinson, "Naser J. Abdo Arrested in Possible Ft. Hood Attack Plot."

⁶⁷ "AWOL Soldier Gets Life Term for Fort Hood Plot."

There is no available information to suggest how Abdo acquired the pistol that law enforcement found in his motel room. Abdo was charged with possession of an illegal firearm so it can be inferred that he came upon the firearms illegally. It is also likely that Abdo resorted to obtaining the pistol illegally because when he attempted to buy a firearm at a gun store in Kentucky, he was denied sale because the clerks deemed his behavior alarming.⁶⁸

Abdo traveled to Guns Galore in Killeen, Texas. The clerk at the gun store carefully watched Abdo browse the store for twenty minutes. Abdo eventually purchased six pounds of smokeless gunpowder, one magazine for a semiautomatic handgun, and shotgun shells.⁶⁹ He noted that Abdo asked many questions about what he was buying.⁷⁰ The clerk thought it was particularly alarming for Abdo to be buying ammunition and smokeless powder in large quantities when he did not know that much about it.⁷¹ Later that day the gun store clerk informed Killeen Police about his concerns.⁷²

By contacting the cab driver who transported Abdo from the gun store, Killeen Police were able to track Abdo to his motel room where they found all of the supplies he planned to use in his terror attack.⁷³ They discovered the smokeless gunpowder and that he had purchased the previous day at Guns Galore. They also discovered the Fort Hood uniform he had purchased with patches, sugar, a pressure cooker, additional magazines and ammunition,⁷⁴ a pistol, the article, how to “make a bomb in your kitchen of your mom” from the English-language al-Qaeda magazine *Inspire*, a cell phone, wall clocks, duct tape, and a shopping list of other bomb-making materials.⁷⁵ Although he still needed to assemble the bomb, Abdo had all he needed to carry out his attack.

Almost immediately following his detainment and arrest at the motel, Abdo admitted his plans to authorities.⁷⁶ He admitted he was planning to attack, hurt, and kill soldiers from Fort Hood because of what troops were doing in Afghanistan.⁷⁷ Specifically, Abdo called out the name, “Abeer Quassim al Janvi.”⁷⁸ Al Janvi was a fourteen-year-old girl raped in Iraq in 2006 by soldiers from the 101st Airborne Division out of Fort Campbell. He admitted that he had planned to attack a soldier back in Fort Campbell and that after he set off the bomb in Texas he planned to wait outside and shoot survivors.⁷⁹ He revealed that the end of his plan was to die in a police shoot-out with police. He made a point to tell law enforcement agents that he did not want to hurt any innocent people and that he only wanted to make a point.⁴⁴ Investigators were also able to determine

⁶⁸ Stengle, “Naser Abdo Confession.”

⁶⁹ Schwartz et al., “Fort Hood Suspect Mentions Al Qaeda Cleric.”

⁷⁰ Schwartz et al., “Fort Hood Suspect Mentions Al Qaeda Cleric.”

⁷¹ Barbara Starr, Marylynn Ryan, and Carol Cratty, “Official: Soldier Said He Wanted to Attack Fort Hood Troops,” CNN.com, July 29, 2011.

⁷² Schwartz et al., “Fort Hood Suspect Mentions Al Qaeda Cleric.”

⁷³ Goodman, “Soldier Held Amid Terror Plot at Fort Hood.”

⁷⁴ Knickerbocker, “Another Fort Hood Terror Plot? Army Pfc. Naser Abdo Arrested.”

⁷⁵ Goodman, “Soldier Held Amid Terror Plot at Fort Hood.”

⁷⁶ Janowski, “Judge Rules Abdo's Confession Admissible.”

⁷⁷ Starr, “Official: Soldier Said He Wanted to Attack Fort Hood Troops.”

⁷⁸ Johnson, “Belligerent Fort Hood Suspect Denounces Military.”

⁷⁹ Janowski, “Judge Rules Abdo's Confession Admissible.”

that Abdo was acting alone and that any risk of an attack was averted by arresting Abdo.

Considering Abdo had all the necessary supplies and that he was convinced that his martyrdom was the only way to become a good Muslim, it is very likely that he would have carried out his attack. Even after he was charged and standing trial, he was not remorseful. Abdo was forced to wear a surgical mask because he spit blood at officers, and vowed, "I do not ask the court to give me mercy, for Allah is the one that gives me mercy."⁸⁰ Abdo's lack of remorse and dedication to Islam after his arrest further support the likelihood that he would have carried out the attack if he had not been apprehended.

Abdo was convicted in Federal Court on May 24, 2012, of attempted use of a weapon of mass destruction, attempted murder of federal employees and other weapons charges.⁸¹ He was sentenced on August 10, 2012, to two consecutive sentences of life in prison plus sixty years with no chance of parole.⁸² On August 19, 2013 the US 5th Circuit Court rejected Abdo's appeal and upheld his conviction.⁸³ He is currently serving his prison sentence in ADX Florence maximum-security prison in Colorado.⁸⁴

6. Role of informants

While there were no official police informants working alongside Abdo to stop his terrorist plot, the role of an unofficial civilian informant was crucial to stopping Abdo's attack. When Abdo went to purchase guns at Gun Galore in Killeen, Texas, the clerk noticed something did not seem right in Abdo's demeanor and questions. The clerk noted that Abdo did not even know what he was looking for or buying.⁸⁵ The clerk in Guns Galore had been on extra high alert because that same store was where Major Nidal Malik Hasan had purchased the guns he used in his shooting rampage at Fort Hood in 2009. It is unclear whether Abdo knew Hasan purchased his gun at this same store. The clerk watched Abdo leave in a cab. After work, he still felt uneasy about his encounter with Abdo at the store and so notified the local authorities.

Police credited the gun store clerk with busting the terror plot. Police said if not for the clerk it that would have been highly likely that they would have been delivering a very different news conference.⁸⁶ They also said that, "We now have an example of what works to prevent these type attacks,"⁸⁷ suggesting that public alertness to suspicious individuals and encounters and a willingness to report these observations is the best way to prevent local, "lone wolf" attacks. Lone wolf attacks are a particularly dangerous threat because it is harder for law enforcement to track terrorists when they are not working within a known network.⁸⁸

⁸⁰ "AWOL Soldier Gets Life Term for Fort Hood Plot ."

⁸¹ Post Staff Report, "Fort Hood Bomb Plotter Found Guilty on All Charges

⁸² Johnson, "Naser Jason Abdo Sentenced To Life For Fort Hood Plot."

⁸³ Rafique, "Court Rejects Abdo's Appeal."

⁸⁴ "Inmate Locator."

⁸⁵ Schwartz et al., "Fort Hood Suspect Mentions Al Qaeda Cleric."

⁸⁶ Levine, "AWOL Soldier Arrested in What Police Say Was New Fort Hood Terror Plot."

⁸⁷ Starr, "Official: Soldier Said He Wanted to Attack Fort Hood Troops."

⁸⁸ Knickerbocker, "Another Fort Hood Terror Plot? Army Pfc. Naser Abdo Arrested."

7. Connections

Police were able to determine, rather quickly, that Abdo was acting alone. Abdo was self-motivated to kill service members in retaliation for the United States Army's involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan. By bombing and shooting American soldiers, Abdo felt he was honoring the lives of Muslims in the countries where those soldiers would be deployed.

Abdo made mention of an al-Qaeda cleric Anwar al-Awlaki to authorities but no concrete connection was ever able to be made. Al-Awlaki was also suspected to be connected to Hasan and the 2009 Fort Hood Shootings.⁸⁹

While Abdo had no concrete connection to Hasan, the two men shared many of the same struggles as noted earlier.

8. Relation to the Muslim community

Abdo considered himself a very devout Muslim. As a devout Muslim, he struggled to serve in the United States Army. By June 2010, when he was scheduled to deploy to Afghanistan, Abdo no longer felt that serving in the Army was an appropriate way to defend the rights and lives of Muslims. He told a reporter, "A Muslim is not allowed to participate in an unjust war by Islamic standards. Any Muslim who knows his religion or maybe takes into account what his religion says can find out very clearly why he should not participate in the U.S. military."⁹⁰

Islam teaches that to die a martyr in the name of Allah is one of the most honorable things a Muslim can do on Earth.⁹¹ In order to ensure that he would die a devout and good Muslim, Abdo believed if he needed to die a martyr defending Islam in the name of Allah. Abdo planned to achieve martyrdom by dying in a police shootout after bringing justice to the United States Army for wronging Muslims.

Besides his self-proclaimed devotion to his own faith, however, there is no documentation that Abdo ever visited an Islamic Mosque or had any active involvement within a Muslim community.

9. Depiction by the authorities

Shortly after Abdo was apprehended and arrested on July 27, 2011, law enforcement held a press conference.⁹² At the press conference police alluded to the severity of the threat from Abdo's plot and informed the public that they had no reason to believe that Abdo had any accomplices.⁹³ They also thanked the role of the gun clerk that had tipped them off. Police were able to avoid causing alarm because they already had Abdo in custody and had determined he had acted alone by the time they delivered their press conference.

⁸⁹ Schwartz et al., "Fort Hood Suspect Mentions Al Qaeda Cleric."

⁹⁰ Netter, "Devout Muslim Soldier Hopes to Avoid Deployment to Afghanistan."

⁹¹ Ezzati, "The Concept of Martyrdom in Islam."

⁹² "UPDATE 2: Statement on Arrest of Soldier in Killeen," FortHoodPressCenter.com, July 28, 2013.

⁹³ Levine. "AWOL Soldier Arrested in What Police Say Was New Fort Hood Terror Plot."

10. Coverage by the media

Media outlets did not catch wind of Abdo's terror plot until after police had arrested him on July 27, 2011 within a day of receiving the tip from the Guns Galore store clerk. By the time media crews arrived at the scene, Abdo had already been taken into custody and law enforcement officials were able to get a news conference. There was no opportunity for the media to send out alarmist reports because Abdo was arrested and police were able to tell the media that Abdo was acting alone and there was no reason to believe there was any further risk of danger.⁹⁴

Most media sources turned their attention to the gun store clerk that informed the police. They interviewed the clerk, Greg Ebert, for his account of the event and Abdo's unsettling demeanor. Ebert's story, face, and statements flooded the news stories surrounding the terror plot, and media and internet sources hailed him as a hero.⁹⁵ Other sources dug up their stories from when Abdo reached out to them during his struggle to be discharged from the Army as a conscientious objector.⁹⁶ Some media drew a connection between the 2009 Fort Hood Shootings and Abdo's plot.⁹⁷

Most news stories were published the two days following Abdo's arrest suggesting that the media did not dwell on the plot because it was never carried out and because the arrest happened so quickly. There was additional media interest when Abdo was convicted and when he was sentenced.

11. Policing costs

Abdo's case was quick and required little investigation or surveillance work. The case also traveled through the court system relatively quickly. Police were not actively searching for Abdo or watching him at the time of his arrest on July 27, 2011. And there were no police hired informants working close to Abdo to spoil his terror plot. And shortly after his arrest, Abdo confessed to plotting a terror attack to kill soldiers from Fort Hood.⁹⁸

Between all of the evidence in Abdo's motel room and his confession, law enforcement did not have to exert much effort to build a case against him. His entire legal process from arrest to sentencing took slightly more than a year. In comparison, the legal proceedings of Hasan for his shooting rampage in 2009 took almost four years to close.⁹⁹ Abdo was arrested on July 27, 2011, and was charged with attempted use of a weapon of mass destruction, attempted murder of federal employees and weapons charges for his possession of an illegal firearm.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁴ Knickerbocker, "Another Fort Hood Terror Plot? Army Pfc. Naser Abdo Arrested."

⁹⁵ John Farmer, "Gun Store Clerk Saved Lives – Guns Galore Is Your Place to Shop in Killeen, TX." BlueCollarRepublican.wordpress.com. July 29, 2011.

⁹⁶ Hoskinson, "Naser J. Abdo Arrested in Possible Ft. Hood Attack Plot."

⁹⁷ Hoskinson, "Naser J. Abdo Arrested in Possible Ft. Hood Attack Plot."

⁹⁸ Johnson, "Naser Jason Abdo Sentenced To Life for Fort Hood Plot."

⁹⁹ Billy Kenber, "Nidal Hasan Sentenced to Death for Fort Hood Shooting Rampage," WashingtonPost.com, August 28, 2013.

¹⁰⁰ Post Staff Report, "Fort Hood Bomb Plotter Found Guilty on All Charges."

He was convicted of all charges in Federal Court on May 24, 2012.¹⁰¹ It took the six jurors fifty-five minutes to find him guilty.¹⁰² The biggest expense in Abdo's case is the money that will be spent keeping him behind bars for the rest of his life, but that is a small price to pay in exchange for protecting the lives of those service men and women in Killeen, Texas.

12. Relevance of the internet

There is some evidence to suggest that Abdo used the internet to gain information to plan and to carry out his plot. Law enforcement found an article from the online al-Qaeda magazine *Inspire* in Abdo's hotel room that detailed how to make a bomb out of household items.¹⁰³ There was also evidence that Abdo was using the internet to participate in other anti-war activities. Abdo's personal Facebook page detailed his trip to New York City in September of 2010 to attend an anti-war vigil in support of Pfc. Bradley Manning. Manning, the alleged source of the WikiLeaks that released classified United States war documents.¹⁰⁴ Besides the online magazine and Abdo's details about his trip, there is no other concrete evidence to reveal Abdo's dependence on the internet.

13. Are we safer?

Abdo's arrest and incarceration make the country a safer place in two ways. Primarily, with Abdo behind bars he is unable to attack American soldiers. Additionally, Abdo's case proves that Americans are becoming more aware to suspicious persons and activity. Average alert Americans with the courage to speak up can save lives and prevent terror attacks. Reading Abdo's story and learning that one gun owner spoiled the entire attack might encourage other Americans to step forward when they see something.

14. Conclusions

The most remarkable conclusion that can be drawn from Abdo's case is the impact that civilians can have in stopping terrorists. Lone wolf terrorist attacks like him are particularly dangerous. They are extremely self-motivated to cause destruction in the name of their self-proclaimed cause. They act alone and without a network, which makes them difficult to track and discover. All the technology and surveillance the United States counterterrorism officials have would have failed to stop Abdo before he placed the bombs, but the observant eye of a civilian gun store clerk did.

We can also draw conclusions about the Army granting Abdo conscientious objector status. In the 2009 Fort Hood Shootings, Hasan's main grievance was that the United States Army should not force Muslims to fight fellow Muslims in Iraq and Afghanistan.¹⁰⁵ Abdo had expressed himself

¹⁰¹ Johnson, "Naser Jason Abdo Sentenced To Life For Fort Hood Plot."

¹⁰² Sig Christenson, "Abdo Guilty of Fort Hood Terror Plot," MySanAntonio.com, May 24, 2012.

¹⁰³ Goodman, "Soldier Held Amid Terror Plot at Fort Hood."

¹⁰⁴ Levine, "AWOL Soldier Arrested in What Police Say Was New Fort Hood Terror Plot."

¹⁰⁵ Elizabeth Sheld, "Nidal Hasan Wanted Muslims In Army to Have Option for Conscientious Objection," Breitbart.com, August 30, 2013.

throughout his time in the Army as an extremely devout Muslim. He complained that the Army was not allowing him time to fast or pray during the day.¹⁰⁶ He also blamed the Army for the way other soldiers treated him because of his faith.¹⁰⁷ When Abdo finally felt he needed to leave the Army it was only because he was set to be deployed to Afghanistan. Abdo argued that it was unjust for the Army to send him to fight against other Muslims.¹⁰⁸ Although the Army's Conscientious Objector Review board initially denied his request, this decision was later overruled. Considering the possibility of another Fort Hood incident and Abdo's complaints with the Army, it is reasonable to assume that the superior officer overruled Abdo's initial denial because it was safer.

If Army officials feared Abdo would retaliate like Hasan, they were not far off, considering how closely Abdo modeled his terror plot to match Hasan's. Hasan fought back against the Army and was rewarded with praise from the Islamic extremist community. Abdo sought to attack the Army in a similar way in order to garner the same praise.

In reality, Abdo was most concerned with pleasing his god and being a good Muslim. Abdo seemed so obsessed with Hasan not because he wanted to be Hasan, but because he wanted to be like Hasan. He saw Hasan as the most prime and real example of a good Muslim. In fact, Abdo planned to achieve more than Hasan in order to be a better Muslim in the eyes of Allah.¹⁰⁹ At his trial, Abdo told reporters that he, "will forever live in Hasan's shadow despite efforts to outdo him."¹¹⁰ Abdo's plan to outdo Hasan was to martyr himself in a police shootout after he placed the bomb in the restaurant and shoot survivors.¹¹¹

We can also draw a conclusion from Abdo's desire to be a good Muslim. The child pornography charges seemed set Abdo off, starting with the plot to kidnap an Army officer and ending with the bomb plot near Fort Hood. His initial plot especially seemed like retaliation for what he believed was a set-up. After his arrest however, Abdo made little to reference to the child pornography accusations. Instead, he mentioned his devotion to Allah, his goal to be a good Muslim, and his desire to seek justice for innocent Muslims. While his initial violent plot might have been for retaliation, we can conclude that his grand bomb plot in Fort Hood was motivated by a larger desire to be a good Muslim and bring justice to those he thought were responsible for killing innocent Muslims, namely the United States Army.

We can also conclude that, because his motivation behind the Fort Hood bomb plot was not centered on the child pornography charges, Abdo would have attempted to carry out the attack even if the child pornography charges had never surfaced and he had been discharged from the Army. Abdo was convinced at the time of his arrest that he needed to die a martyr to show his faith to Allah and avenge the lives of innocent Muslims. Islam teaches that to die a martyr in the

¹⁰⁶ Fernandez, "Soldier Arrested in Suspected Bomb Plot Had Series of Disputes with Army."

¹⁰⁷ Fernandez, "Soldier Arrested in Suspected Bomb Plot Had Series of Disputes with Army."

¹⁰⁸ Netter, "Devout Muslim Soldier Hopes to Avoid Deployment to Afghanistan."

¹⁰⁹ "AWOL Soldier Gets Life Term for Fort Hood Plot."

¹¹⁰ "AWOL Soldier Gets Life Term for Fort Hood Plot."

¹¹¹ "Abdo Planned to Kidnap, Kill Campbell Official."

name of Allah is one of the honorable things a Muslim can do on Earth.¹¹² In order to ensure that he would die a devout and good Muslim, Abdo believed if he needed to die a martyr defending Islam in the name of Allah, and he planned to achieve martyrdom by dying in a police shootout after punishing the Army for wronging Muslims. Between his devotion to dying a good Muslim and avenging Muslims wronged by the Army, Abdo was an extremely self-motivated lone wolf terrorist who would have killed until he was stopped.

Lone wolf terrorists are often have a loner personality, act on personal stress, and want to cause violence.¹¹³ Abdo lived in a troubled life. He allegedly only joined the Army because he had no other options.¹¹⁴ He was accused of possessing child pornography, and he felt the United States Army was to blame for discriminating and attacking Muslims, including him. The only thing he felt passionate about was his faith in Islam. His faith was so strong that combined with his personality and stress it motivated him to plan a terror attack. Abdo was not shy to admit that his ultimate plan was to kill American soldiers. Abdo's faith told him that he needed to defend his faith. Abdo's experience with the military and with the guidance of his hero, Hasan, Abdo believed the best way to defend his faith was to carry out a violent attack against the United States Army. An extreme faith in Islam and an extreme portrayal of American soldiers as the enemy of his faith drove a "weird" teenager from Texas to buy six pounds of smokeless gunpowder even though he had no idea what it was.

¹¹² Ezzati, "The Concept of Martyrdom in Islam."

¹¹³ "Joseph Stack and the Lone Wolf Mentality," *Anti-Defamation League*, February 22, 2010.

¹¹⁴ "Terror Suspect Grew Up in Broken North Texas Home."