

ON INTENT, MENTAL HEALTH, AND TERRORISM

In thoroughly unsurprising news, Joshua Ryne Goldberg was declared unfit to stand trial yesterday.

Goldberg is the Jewish guy who pretended to be a lot of things online, many of them anti-Jewish, but who had a role in the incitement of the Garland, TX attack and got busted for sending an informant instructions on how to build a bomb and encouraging him to bomb Kansas City's 9/11 commemoration.

Joshua Goldberg is a troll. But he has liaised with IS supporters and called for terrorist attacks against the West. Police who arrested him on Friday morning Australian time said he had recently instructed a confidential source on how to make a bomb.

And even before his recent exploits, Goldberg's dangerous social media fantasies may have had real-world consequences. An Australi Witness tweet in the lead up to an exhibition of pictures of the Prophet Mohammed in Garland, Texas, in May, urged Muslims to go with "weapons, bombs or with knives". Two men answered the call, and were killed by police.

"Australi Witness" praised them as martyrs.

Since July he has fed out a series of bomb threats against various targets, including a synagogue in Melbourne and another in Perth. Most recently, he said he was working with others to direct a "pressure cooker bombing" in the United States.

[snip]

He has masqueraded as a neo-Nazi blogger called "Michael Slay" on the site Daily Stormer, and as a fictional Australian left-wing anti-free speech activist called "Tanya Cohen". He's caused significant harm to anti-sexploitation campaigner Caitlin Roper by setting up a fake account in her name and then defaming transsexuals.

According to a prison psychologist who testified at a hearing yesterday, Goldberg suffers from an illness on the schizophrenia spectrum.

After numerous interviews, Dr. Lisa Feldman, a forensic psychologist with the Federal Detention Center in Miami, found Goldberg not mentally sound enough for trial. She said Goldberg suffers from a mental disorder she described as on the "schizophrenia spectrum" and that he could not participate in his own defense.

[snip]

Goldberg exhibited "very paranoid, suspicious ideas and a feeling that other people wanted to harm him," Feldman testified.

After his transfer to the detention center in Miami, Goldberg stopped bathing himself and was eventually put on suicide watch, Feldman said. She said he insisted constantly that he should be in a hospital, not a prison.

While she could not rule out that Goldman was exaggerating some of his mental health symptoms, Feldman said Goldman's background materials and behavior at the facility made it clear to her that he was not able to understand his legal predicament.

Neither Kevin Frein, a national security

prosecutor for the U.S. Attorney's Office, nor Goldman's attorney Paul Shorstein, objected to her findings.

Let me be clear: I don't doubt that Goldberg is incompetent to stand trial. You'd sort of have to be, to voice support for all these contradictory issues.

That said, I suspect it was a lot easier for the criminal justice system to find him incompetent than it would be to find the long list of young Muslim men with mental illnesses who get caught in stings.

That's true, in part, because people are going to believe that bluster from a Jewish guy advocating attacks targeting Jews lacks real intent, whereas bluster from a Muslim harbors intent. It's all bluster, often spurred by mental illness, but we believe the Muslims meant it.

But also because Goldberg's claim of credit for the Garland attack might pose really uncomfortable questions for the government, given the conflicting reports on whether they had a warning of the attack (making it likely they were following Goldberg). If ISIS-inspired attacks are, in fact, inspired by Jewish kids living in their parents' basement just talking shite, then what does that say about the war on terror?

Moreover, what does that say about FBI's success prosecuting guys for "material support" because they retweet ISIS propaganda? Goldberg was *producing* ISIS propaganda, but it's hard to believe he really "meant" it.

A whole lot of online trolling consists of individuals engaging in make-believe to see if they can get a response. But what if it becomes increasingly clear that some of it really is make-believe, even while that make-believe has real consequences?