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An Exploration of Transportation Terrorist Stabbing Attacks

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INTRODUCTION

*“Make whatever preparations are easy for you ... select your targets, and carry out a strike that will tear out their hearts and make them lose their minds, **for a piercing bullet, or a stab deep in the intestines, or the detonation of an explosive device in your lands is akin to a thousand operations here with us [in Iraq and Syria], and don’t neglect [also] the ramming attacks on the roads**”.*¹

In his August 22, 2018 message to supporters of the Islamic State of Iraq and [greater] Syria (ISIS), Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi implored ISIS fighters in Syria and Iraq as well as those on various jihadist fronts in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia not to be dismayed by military setbacks suffered by the Islamic State, but to continue fighting, confident that Allah would ultimately reward those who remained steadfast with victory. In the same message, he exhorted homegrown jihadists abroad— “the fierce lions in the lands of the Cross—Canada, Europe, and elsewhere” to carry out simple attacks within their limited capabilities that would nonetheless have great psychological impact because they would strike in the enemy’s homeland.

In contrast to al Qaeda’s early strategy, ISIS did not focus on launching major terrorist operations directed against the “far enemy”—principally, the United States. Instead, ISIS concentrated on capturing territory for an Islamic State—the caliphate. To support that effort, ISIS invited foreign fighters to join them in the construction and defense of this territory—tens of thousands of volunteers responded.

As al Qaeda did after 9/11, ISIS also exhorted its followers abroad to carry out attacks where they were, but terrorism abroad remained a sideshow to expanding the caliphate. Homegrown terrorist attacks were mostly left to local initiatives. ISIS claimed credit for those attacks that occurred, but made little investment in distant operations.

The jihadist network that carried out a series of spectacular terrorist attacks in France and Belgium in 2015 and 2016 was organized by Abdelhamid Abaaoud, a Belgian-Moroccan who joined ISIS as a foreign fighter but who appeared more interested in bringing the jihad home than waging holy war in Syria. Abaaoud’s aspirations were supported by Abu Mohammad al-Adnani, the head of ISIS’s propaganda and foreign operations, but the relationship between the two men is not entirely clear: Was Abaaoud merely an operative taking orders from Adnani or was Adnani exploiting terrorist ambitions and the entrepreneurial skills of Abaaoud?²

Al-Baghdadi’s August 22 exhortation reflects a trend in jihadist terrorism over the last decade. The homegrown terrorist’s arsenal comprises explosive devices, firearms, knives, and vehicles. Knives, swords, daggers, and axes were the primary weapons of war and assassination for

centuries before gunpowder. Since the mid-19th century, bombs and bullets have been the principal terrorist weapons. Bombings and armed assaults continue to dominate the terrorists' tactical repertoire, but more primitive modes of attack have emerged as terrorists altered their recruiting mode from inducting to inciting operatives.

Inspiring homegrown terrorists via the Internet means enlisting individuals with limited skills and capabilities. This affects tactics and targets. Remote instruction in bomb-making is no substitute for hands-on experience. The risks of failure are high.

In a few cases, jihadist volunteers who managed to hook up with jihadist groups in Southern Asia or the Middle East could be provided with explosive devices (for example, the Shoe-bomber and the Underwear-Bomber) or could be trained in their fabrication (for example, the July 7, 2005 bombers in London, the 2009 plot to bomb subways in New York, the 2010 attempt to bomb Times Square, the 2015 and 2016 bombers in Paris and Brussels, and the 2017 bombing in Manchester England). As these journeys became more perilous and explosives or their precursors more difficult to obtain without risk of arousing suspicion, bombings became too difficult for most homegrown terrorists.

In the United States, where guns are readily available, jihad-inspired terrorists caused the most casualties in shooting attacks. Since 9/11, jihadists in the United States have carried out 11 shooting attacks, four bombings, four attacks with knives (including one hatchet attack), and three car ramming attacks, one of which was followed by a stabbing attack. Of the 103 persons jihad-inspired terrorists killed, 91 (or 88 percent) were shot, eight died in a single car ramming attack, three were killed in explosions, and one was killed in a knife attack.³

In other countries, homegrown terrorists relied more on easily accessible weapons—knives, hatchets, and motor vehicles. Israel is a unique case, but the same thing applies there. Excluding the rockets and mortars that are launched against Israel by Hizballah and Hamas from Lebanon and the Gaza Strip, the Israel Defense Force and security services appear to have severely limited access to explosives and guns. Like al Qaeda and ISIS, Hamas and other Palestinian groups have been reduced to incitement. The result has been an increase in vehicle ramming attacks and an apparent increase in stabbing or hatchet attacks worldwide.

Homegrown terrorists were also advised to select easy targets where the attacker did not have to penetrate a security perimeter. This meant anywhere people gathered. That put public surface transportation—trains, train stations, buses—high on the list. Terrorist strategists have figured out that such attacks, even when they yielded only a handful of casualties nonetheless caused greater public alarm than hundreds of larger scale attacks in distant conflict zones.

Previous reports by the Mineta Transportation Institute have addressed bombings.⁴ Car ramming attacks or what are sometimes called vehicular rammings have been the subject of more recent reporting.⁵ This report looks first at terrorist stabbing attacks against the public as a general phenomenon, and then examines stabbing attacks in public surface transportation venues.

GLOBAL TRENDS IN KNIFE ATTACKS

It is difficult to discern global trends in murder weapons, and so research has focused mostly on gun violence and less on other means of murder. This being said, however, attacks with knives (including other sharp weapons) globally account for roughly 24 percent of all homicides compared to 41 percent for firearms, but the regional breakdowns vary greatly. In Oceania (Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Island nations), knives account for 55 percent of homicides while guns account for only ten percent. In the Americas, where firearms are more readily available, knives are the instrument of murder in 17 percent of the cases, with guns used in 66 percent of the cases. In Europe, knives are used in 33 percent of the murders while guns are used in only 13 percent. In Asia, knives are used in 25 percent of the cases, and in Africa, knives are used in 30 percent of homicide cases.⁶

Although the homicide rate in the United States has declined over the past 25 years, the proportions of the weapons used in U.S. murders has not significantly changed, at least in recent years. According to recent FBI statistics, between 1,500 and 1,600 persons are murdered with knives every year in the United States.⁷ This represents about 11 to 13 percent of total homicides, and is the second most prevalent murder weapon after handguns. There has been no upward trend apparent in the five years between 2012 and 2016.

England and Wales have seen an 11 percent increase in gun crime and a 22 percent increase in knife crime.⁸ Knife crime has reportedly surged by 16 percent in London, where, according to the police, 1,299 stabbings occurred between April 2017 and April 2018.⁹ French authorities have additionally reported an increase in knife crime.

Some caution is in order here, however. Knife crime may include illegal possession, brandishing, or threatening with knives, stabbings, and fatal attacks. A detailed analysis is required to understand what the numbers mean.

There has been a rise in dramatic stabbing attacks on strangers in public places in Europe and elsewhere in the world, most of which have been categorized as terrorist attacks. Although the public stabbing attacks are few in number relative to the total volume of knife crime, these events attract a great deal of media attention, which then draw greater media attention to similar crimes—giving the impression of a more dramatic increase in similar crimes. In fact, there may be an increase in certain kinds of stabbing attacks, for example, mass stabbing attacks on strangers in public areas, though these incidents represent only a tiny fraction of the total volume of stabbings.

THEORIES TO EXPLAIN THE APPARENT RISE

Many theories are offered to explain the growth in stabbing attacks, putting aside the question of whether there are actual increases in knife violence. Some observers see growing knife crime simply as a component of growing violent crime in Western society, pointing out that gun and knife crime are both up, although long-term trends show a decline in homicide rates. Others view stabbings as a consequence of the increasing flow of drugs into Europe. Drugs fuel violent crime. An increase in the flow of illegal drugs brings about an increase of criminal violence.

Other theories connect knife crime with deeper societal problems, asserting that knife crime is most prevalent in areas of poverty and marginalization. Still, other theories see knife crime as evidence of general changes in public behavior. According to this interpretation, an increasing number of people are angry and frustrated with life, ready to explode with rage via violent crime. The inhibitions to organized violence--war--are greater, while individual inhibitions are lower.

Some argue that social media both inspire and reward individual violence. The distribution of visual recordings of acts of violence and the prospect of instant fame and glory may act as a source of inspiration and provide incentives for violence.

Others see stabbing attacks in more operational terms: Guns are harder to get than knives, making knife attacks a likelier choice. Differences in gun control laws may explain differences in the proportions of weapons used in murders in various countries, but does not explain a growth in stabbings. Although France has restrictions on gun ownership, French criminals know how to get guns, including automatic weapons, which are sourced primarily from the Balkans. French jihadist terrorists, many of whom come from criminal backgrounds, have had no difficulty obtaining firearms.

Mental disorders appear in other explanations for what is seen as a growing volume of knife crimes. It is true that some of recent jihadist exhortations, which portray and exalt beheadings and other atrocities, may be attracting individuals with more serious mental problems and histories of aggression, which is not to imply that sufferers of mental disorders are dangerous.

Finally, terrorist incitement—the exhortations of ISIS and al Qaeda to use knives—also appears among the explanations.

RECENT TRENDS IN EUROPE, CANADA, AUSTRALIA, AND THE UNITED STATES

Looking at recent trends in Europe, Canada, Australia, and the United States would seem to validate an increase in politically or racially-motivated stabbing attacks (although these sometimes blur with attacks by mentally-disordered assailants). Using the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) maintained by START at the University of Maryland as a starting point and searching public sources for additional incidents provide researchers with a dataset of 61 stabbing attacks against targets outside of public surface transportation since 2014.¹⁰ We note that the attacks collected may not include all that have taken place, particularly those by mentally disordered persons with few fatalities or injuries.

These are only attacks against members of the public in public buildings or areas, or against police, military, or security services guarding them. They do not include (a) attacks against individual political figures (4 attacks), or (b) attacks in which other attack methods have also been used, such as vehicle rammings, automatic or semi-automatic weapons, or bombs (13 attacks). We have also excluded attacks against the police and military at their barracks and offices, although making this cut requires judgment calls. The idea here is to capture attacks that are aimed at the public, in the areas where the public reside or live.

Of the 61 stabbing attacks that occurred in this group of countries, three occurred in 2014, ten in 2015, 20 in 2016, eighteen in 2017, and ten in 2018. The GTD data for 2018 will not be released for many months, and therefore we cannot be sure if the attacks have declined or if we have not captured all of the relevant attacks. These numbers underscore that such attacks are only a tiny fraction of the total number of stabbings in any country.

As Table 1 shows, the United States and France lead the list with 13 attacks (or 21.3 percent) each followed by the United Kingdom with seven attacks (11.5 percent), Belgium with six attacks (9.8%), Australia with five attacks (8.2 percent), Germany with four attacks (6.6 percent), Austria, Canada, Finland, Greece, Italy and Sweden with two attacks respectively (3.3 percent), and Spain with just one attack (1.6 percent).

It is important to remember, however, that while these attacks are counted the same way across all these countries, the populations, as measured by the World Bank in 2017, are vastly different. For example, the populations of France (67.1 million) and the United Kingdom (66.0 million) are only 19 percent of the U.S. population (352.7 million); the smallest population, that of Finland (5.5 million) is only 2%. Thirteen attacks in Finland would be much more significant than in the United States. In fact, Finland experienced only two attacks.

1. Attacks by Country

Country	# Attacks	%	Cumulative %
France	13	21.3%	21.3%
United States	13	21.3%	42.6%
United Kingdom	7	11.5%	54.1%
Belgium	6	9.8%	63.9%
Australia	5	8.2%	72.1%
Germany	4	6.6%	78.7%
Austria	2	3.3%	82.0%
Canada	2	3.3%	85.2%
Finland	2	3.3%	88.5%
Greece	2	3.3%	91.8%
Italy	2	3.3%	95.1%
Sweden	2	3.3%	98.4%
Spain	1	1.6%	100.0%
TOTAL/AVERAGES	61	100.0%	100.0%

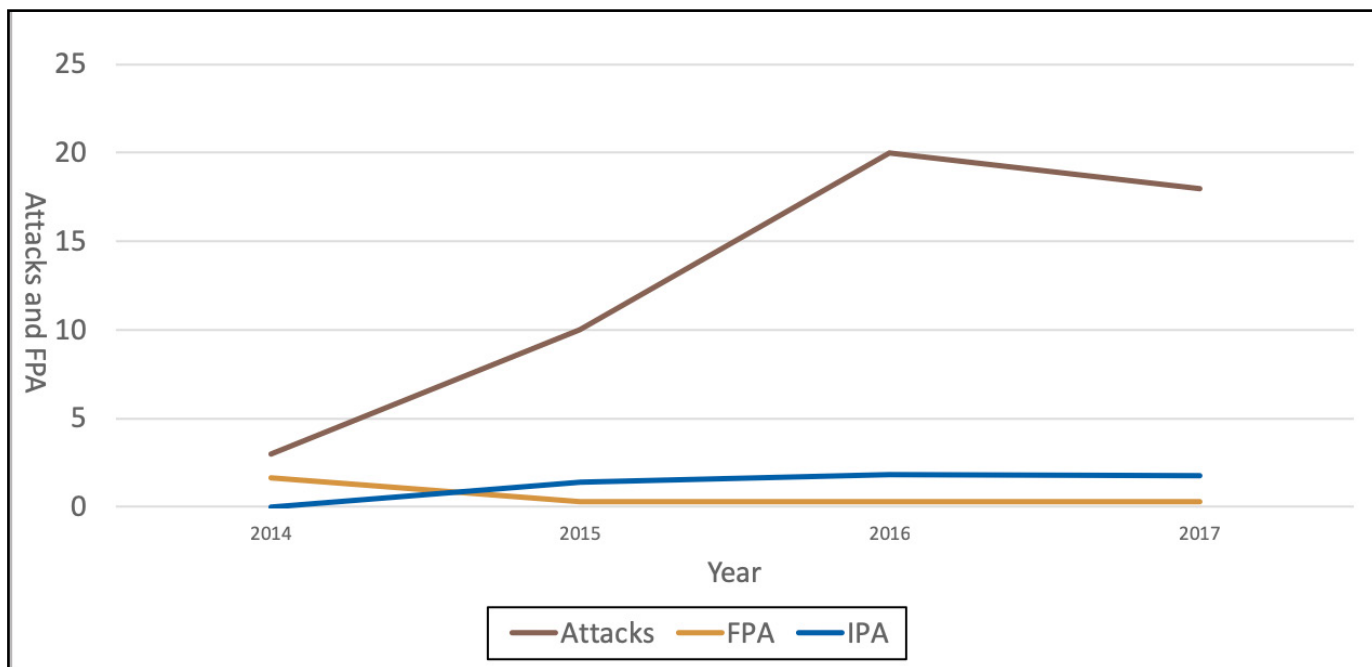
Forty-two attacks (or 66.7 percent) resulted in injuries but no fatalities, and five (7.8%) resulted in neither fatalities nor injuries. Of the remaining 16 attacks, ten resulted in one fatality, four resulted in two fatalities, and two resulted in three fatalities. The total number of fatalities was 24, with an overall fatality per attack (FPA) average of 0.4. The number of injuries totaled 115, with an overall injury per attack (IPA) average of 1.8.

Looking at lethality per attack (not population) by Country, Table 2—which is sorted by FPA and then by IPA—shows us that Sweden, Finland, Australia, and Germany have lethality rates at or above the overall average FPA of 0.4. Looking only at France and the United States, the two countries with more than ten attacks (indicating the attack method is used more often), the lethality rate is 0.3, slightly lower than the overall average.

2. Lethality Rates by Country

Country	Attacks	Fatalities	Injuries	FPA	IPA
Sweden	2	3	1	1.5	0.5
Finland	2	2	9	1.0	4.5
Australia	5	5	6	1.0	1.2
Germany	4	2	11	0.5	2.8
Belgium	6	2	11	0.3	1.8
United States	13	4	32	0.3	2.5
France	13	4	23	0.3	1.8
United Kingdom	7	1	9	0.1	1.3
Austria	2	0	5	0.0	2.5
Canada	2	0	3	0.0	1.5
Greece	2	0	2	0.0	1.0
Spain	1	0	1	0.0	1.0
Italy	2	0	1	0.0	0.5
TOTAL/AVERAGES	61	23	114	0.4	1.9

Are the number of attacks, and lethality, increasing? Leaving 2018 aside, for which the data are not yet complete, Figure 1 shows that the rate of attacks increased and then slightly de-creased, but it also shows that FPA and IPA remain low, and that FPA has decreased, but IPA has increased, only slightly. Again, however, these are very small numbers.



1. Attacks and Lethality 2014-2017

But let us also look through two other lenses: the number of assailants and whether the attack took place in an enclosed space, such as inside a restaurant or residence, versus an open space, such as a shopping center or public square. Table 3 below shows the findings.

3. Attacks and Lethality by Number of Attackers

	Single Assailant	Multiple Assailants	Increase/Decrease in Lethality
# Attacks	45	16	
# Fatalities	19	4	
# Injuries	84	30	
Fatalities Per Attack (FPA)	0.4	0.25	-0.2
Injuries Per Attack (IPA)	1.87	1.88	0.0

- The majority of attacks (45 in total, equating to 74 percent) involved only one attacker. Attacks involving a single attacker accounted for 19 (83 percent) of all fatalities, and 84 (74 percent) of all injuries, giving a lethality rate of 0.42 FPA, and 1.87 IPA.
- The 16 attacks where there were two or more attackers (including a few cases in which the precise number of attackers was not known), account for only four fatalities and 30 injuries, resulting in an FPA of only 0.25—less than that for single attackers—and an IPA of 1.88, virtually the same as that of single attackers.
- This suggests that multiple attackers do not increase lethality in this target set, but in fact decrease it slightly. This may be more a result of the ability of victims to flee even multiple attackers who are not particularly well coordinated.

Turning to whether an enclosed, as opposed to an open space attack increases lethality, we find attacks in more enclosed spaces are more lethal, although the number of casualties still remains small. As Table 4 shows, out of 61 attacks, 41 took place in open spaces, killing ten and injuring 80, with a lethality rate of 0.24 FPA and a 1.95 IPA. The remaining 19 attacks took place in enclosed spaces, killing 13 and injuring 32, resulting in an FPA more than three times as high (0.68), and a slightly lower IPA (1.68). Enclosed spaces do seem to significantly increase overall lethality.

4. Lethality increases by Open and Enclosed Spaces

	Single Assailant	Multiple Assailants	Increase/Decrease in Lethality
# Attacks	41	19	
# Fatalities	10	13	
# Injuries	80	32	
Fatalities Per Attack (FPA)	0.24	0.68	0.4
Injuries Per Attack (IPA)	1.95	1.68	-0.3

Finally, when we look at only the four attacks involving more than one assailant that also occurred in enclosed spaces, we see that these killed only one and injured two, for an FPA of 0.25 and an IPA of 0.50. When we compare this to the 29 attacks that killed 7 and injured 52, generating an FPA of 0.24 and an IPA of 1.79, we see only a slight increase the rate of deaths, with an injury rate that is lower.

These numbers are very small and it is difficult to draw conclusions. However, it appears that lethality of stabbing attacks for this set of targets does not increase with the number of attackers, but does increase significantly when the attacks occur in enclosed spaces, and also increases though less dramatically when multiple attackers operate in enclosed spaces.

We will return to this topic when we examine all attacks worldwide against public surface transport targets, i.e., trains, buses, train stations, and bus stations and stops. We will then also examine the topic by combining all attacks against public surface transport targets with attacks against other public targets in developed countries during the last five years (2014-2018).

Looking at motivations, we see that seven of the 13 stabbing attacks in France were attributed to jihadist-inspired assailants. Two more were motivated by anti-Semitic sentiments and three involved mentally-disordered individuals, including one who claimed he was “sick of France.” Finally, one was conducted by a right-wing extremist on a Muslim civilian.

Two of the four stabbing attacks in Germany were inspired by jihadist ideology, possibly a third, which was claimed by ISIS, but German police doubt the connection. Another attack was committed by right-wing gangs against Syrian refugee boys. The pattern of attacks is similar in the United Kingdom where four of the seven stabbing attacks were attributed to jihadist inspiration while one attack targeted Muslims. The motives in the other two are unknown.

Four of Belgium’s six stabbing attacks were motivated by jihadist ideology. A fifth case involved a Muslim extremist whose claimed grievance was that he had been run over by police in 2011. Political passions motivated a fifth attack. The sixth appears to have been more of a domestic dispute.

Jihadist inspiration was behind three of the remaining 12 stabbing attacks in Europe; four attacks were directed against Middle Eastern refugees and immigrants. Anti-Semitism inspired one attack, anarchism another. The motives behind the remaining two attacks is unclear. Jihadist ideology figures in one of Canada’s stabbing attacks. Jihadist ideology motivated four of Australia’s five stabbing attacks; anti-Muslim sentiments motivated the fifth.

There were 13 attacks in the United States. Of these, jihadists or jihadist-inspired individuals were responsible for five. White supremacists or right-wing extremists were responsible for an additional four, one of which included an attacker with a history of mental disorder. One was a criminal attack on a white victim by African-American assailants, one was a homophobic attack, one had vague political motives, and the motive in the remaining attack is unclear.

The European cases reflect the tensions between jihadist or likely jihadist-inspired terrorists on the one hand and anti-Muslim and anti-Middle Eastern immigrant sentiments on the other. The former account for 21 (or 51 percent) of the 41 attacks in Europe, while the latter account for eight (or 20 percent).

For all of these countries together, jihadist inspiration accounted for 33 (or 54 percent) of the 61 stabbing attacks on the public in the last five years. The exhortations by both ISIS and al Qaeda to carry out attacks with knives appears to have had some effect.

The other attacks appear related to other criminal activity or aggressive behavior connected with mental disorders. However, as we have noted in previous publications, the distinction between terrorism and mental disorder is not always clear. For example, on August 23, 2018, the day after al-Baghdadi issued his call for attacks, a man in Trappes, France (a town west of Paris), stabbed his mother and sister, killing both, and seriously wounding another man. He then fled but was subsequently shot and killed in a confrontation with police. Witnesses told police that the assailant shouted “*Allahu Akbar* (God is greater),” an expression of faith appropriated by jihadists as their battle cry, although it also may be uttered by Muslims in other, non-violent circumstances. ISIS quickly asserted that the attacker was a soldier of the Islamic State, responding to its exhortations to carry out attacks in countries belonging to the coalition of countries engaged

in combat operations against it. That seemed to put the attack in the realm of terrorism, but France's Minister of Interior stated later that, although the attacker was known to support terrorism, he also had a history of mental disorder and there was no evidence connecting the attack with ISIS.

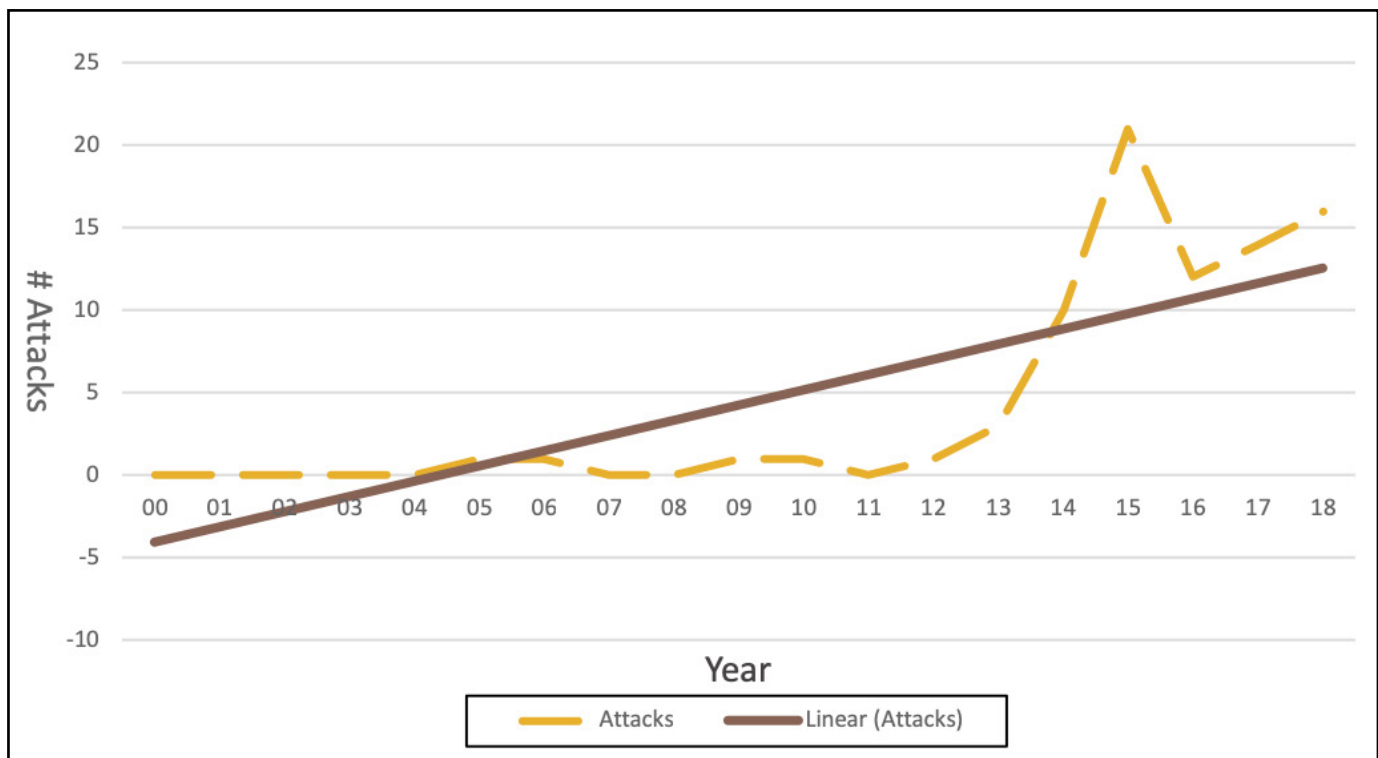
Some assaults in the United States subsequently categorized as terrorist attacks were carried out by individuals with histories of mental disorders. Whether evidence of mental disorder precludes someone from being labeled a terrorist or mental disorder can sometimes manifest itself in adherence to extremist ideologies leading to violent behavior, we must leave to qualified professionals and the courts to decide.

STABBING ATTACKS IN PUBLIC SURFACE TRANSPORTATION VENUES

Public surface transportation offers an attractive venue to those who carry out stabbing attacks. These are public places, easy to access, and often filled with crowds. The Mineta Transportation Institute’s database of attacks on public surface transportation records 81 stabbing attacks using knives, or other sharp objects such as hatchets or swords since 1970.

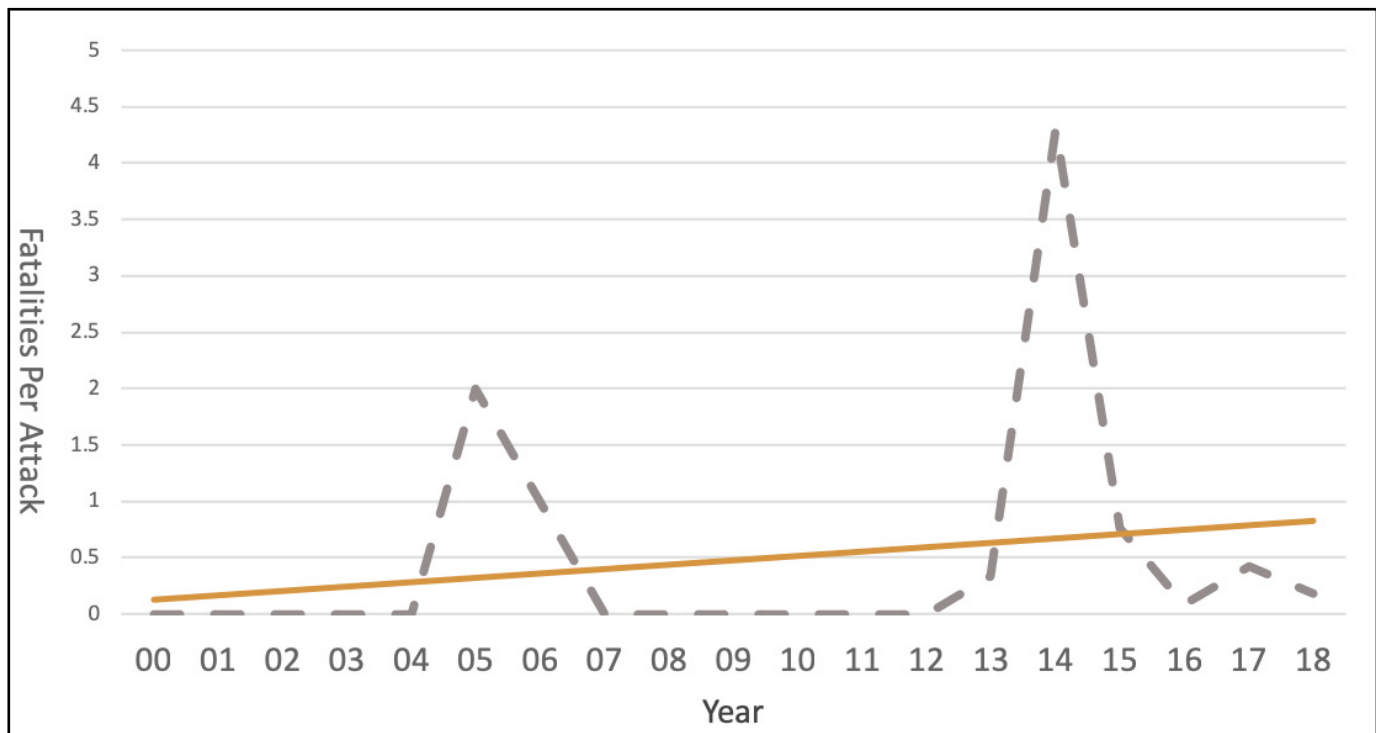
It is the ninth most frequently used of the 56 attack methods used against bus, train, and passenger ferry targets. This represents less than 1.8 percent of the 4,390; attacks recorded between January 1, 1970 and December 31, 2018 against those targets.¹¹ It is the 28th most lethal of these 56 attack methods, with armed assaults and bombings far more lethal. In fact, stabbing attacks account for only 0.6 percent of all fatalities—73 out of 12,516. The average FPA is 0.9 compared to an average FPA of 2.9 for all methods of attack combined. However, the first stabbing attack in the database did not occur until 2005, so their low percentage since 1970 may reflect that this is a relatively recent attack method. Stabbing attacks account for 2.1%, a slight increase, of the 3,848 attacks since January 1, 2005. This increase in percentage, however, comes without an increase in lethality.

Figure 2 shows the occurrence of the events over time, with data shown starting in 2000. Although the numbers are very small, the trajectory closely follows the stabbing attacks on other targets previously discussed, with a sharp increase in 2014, reaching a peak in 2015, then declining.



1. Public Surface Transportation Stabbing Attacks by Year

As Figure 3 shows, however, lethality jumps in 2014, when there were three attacks in which more than one person was killed. These include the March 1, 2014 attack at the Kunming Railway Station in China, in which 31 people were killed and 143 were injured by a group of Uighur Separatists, and the May 21, 2014 attack carried out by a mentally-disordered individual in a Taiwan subway car in which four people were killed and 21 were injured. (We will return later to reconsider the effect of large numbers of attacks and enclosed spaces on lethality.) However, as mentioned above, the overall lethality of stabbing attacks (0.9 FPA) remains low compared to the lethality of all non-infrastructure attacks combined (2.9 FPA).



2. Public Surface Transportation Stabbing Attacks by Lethality

Table 5 shows where the stabbing attacks have taken place. The Middle East leads with the most attacks. This is due almost entirely to attacks in Israel (and the West Bank and Gaza Strip) where Palestinian extremists have, in recent years, increasingly resorted to more primitive forms of attack, including vehicle rammings.

However, Western Europe is not far behind, with 26 attacks. Europe and the North America together saw 33 attacks, nearly 41 percent of the total. This is a departure from the usual pattern of attacks on surface transportation systems, most of which occur in South Asia.

Looking only at all Western European countries (there were no stabbing attacks in Eastern Europe), since 1970 there were 375 attacks on buses, trains, and passenger ferry conveyances and stations. Amongst these attacks, 26 (7%) of them were stabbing attacks. This is more than the 1.8% of attacks stabbings represent against these same targets in all regions since 1970.

5. Public Surface Transportation by Region – Ranked by Frequency

Region	Attacks	% of Total Attacks	Fatalities	% of Total Fatalities	Average FPA	Median FPA	Injuries	% of Total Injuries	Average IPA	Median IPA
Middle East and North Africa	30	37.0%	8	11.0%	0.3	0.0	41	11.9%	1.4	1.0
Western Europe	26	32.1%	4	5.5%	0.2	0.0	69	19.5%	2.7	2.0
East Asia	11	13.6%	37	50.7%	3.4	0.0	219	62.0%	19.9	6.0
North America	7	8.6%	4	5.5%	0.6	0.0	11	3.1%	1.6	1.0
South Asia	2	2.5%	2	2.7%	1.0	1.0	3	0.8%	1.5	1.5
Southeast Asia	2	2.5%	1	1.4%	0.5	0.5	1	0.3%	0.5	0.5
Sub-Saharan Africa	2	2.5%	17	23.3%	8.5	8.5	6	1.7%	3.0	3.0
Russia and the NIS	1	1.2%	0	0.0%	0.0	0.0	2	0.6%	2.0	2.0
TOTAL/AVERAGES/MEDIANS	81	100%	73	100%	0.9	0.0	352	100%	4.3	1.0

6. Public Surface Transportation by Country – Ranked by Frequency

Country	Attacks	% of Total Attacks	Fatalities	% of Total Fatalities	Average FPA	Median FPA	Injuries	% of Total Injuries	Average IPA	Median IPA
Israel	22	27.2%	6	8.2%	0.3	0.0	31	8.8%	1.4	1.0
Germany	9	11.1%	2	2.7%	0.2	0.0	40	11.3%	4.4	3.0
China	7	8.6%	32	43.8%	4.6	0.0	191	54.3%	27.3	8.0
United States	7	8.6%	4	5.5%	0.6	0.0	11	3.1%	1.6	1.0
West Bank & Gaza Strip	7	8.6%	2	2.7%	0.3	0.0	5	1.4%	0.7	1.0
France	5	6.2%	2	2.7%	0.4	0.0	4	1.1%	0.8	0.0
United Kingdom	5	6.2%	0	0.0%	0.0	0.0	9	2.6%	1.8	1.0
Belgium	3	3.7%	0	0.0%	0.0	0.0	6	1.7%	2.0	3.0
Japan	2	2.5%	1	1.4%	0.5	0.5	3	0.9%	1.5	1.5
Taiwan	2	2.5%	4	5.5%	2.0	2.0	25	7.1%	12.5	12.5
Austria	1	1.2%	0	0.0%	0.0	0.0	2	0.6%	2.0	2.0
Bangladesh	1	1.2%	0	0.0%	0.0	0.0	3	0.9%	3.0	3.0
Cameroon	1	1.2%	11	15.1%	11.0	11.0	6	1.7%	6.0	6.0
Central African Republic	1	1.2%	6	8.2%	6.0	6.0	0	0.0%	0.0	0.0
India	1	1.2%	2	2.7%	2.0	2.0	0	0.0%	0.0	0.0
Indonesia	1	1.2%	1	1.4%	1.0	1.0	0	0.0%	0.0	0.0
Italy	1	1.2%	0	0.0%	0.0	0.0	3	0.9%	3.0	3.0
Lebanon	1	1.2%	0	0.0%	0.0	0.0	5	1.4%	5.0	5.0
Netherlands	1	1.2%	0	0.0%	0.0	0.0	2	0.6%	2.0	2.0

Country	Attacks	% of Total Attacks	Fatalities	% of Total Fatalities	Average FPA	Median FPA	Injuries	% of Total Injuries	Average IPA	Median IPA
Norway	1	1.2%	0	0.0%	0.0	0.0	3	0.9%	3.0	3.0
Philippines	1	1.2%	0	0.0%	0.0	0.0	1	0.3%	1.0	1.0
Russian Federation	1	1.2%	0	0.0%	0.0	0.0	2	0.6%	2.0	2.0
TOTAL/AVERAGES/MEDIANS	81	100%	73	100%	0.9	0.0	352	100%	4.3	1.0

Table 6 shows the distribution of attacks by country. Israel leads with 22 attacks. There were an additional seven attacks in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Together, these account for all but one of the incidents in the Middle East and North Africa, which took place in Lebanon. Germany comes in second with nine attacks. Together, Germany, Belgium, France, and the United Kingdom, which have faced the highest terrorist threat in Europe, account for 22 of the 81 attacks.

Table 7 shows the regions ranked by lethality. It shows that 37 (49 percent) of the 75 fatalities have occurred in East Asia, due to several deadly attacks in China, such as the 2014 attacks in China's Kunming Station attack, and in a subway train car in Taiwan, which together killed 35 persons, or 47% of the total number of fatalities.

Attacks with the highest lethality have occurred in Sub-Saharan Africa, but this statistic represents only three attacks, and the lethality rate is driven by a single incident in Cameroon where 11 individuals were killed. The Middle East, Western Europe, and North America (which in this case includes only the United States and Canada), together account for 63 attacks (or 78 percent of the total number), yet have a fatality per attack rate of just 0.3. Putting aside China and regions where there are only one or two attacks, it appears that a high volume of attacks does not mean a high fatality rate, but rather a low one. A single attacker with a knife is rarely capable of mass murder, although he or she may inflict many injuries.

7. Public Surface Transportation by Region – Ranked According to Lethality (overall average is 0.9)

Region	Attacks	% of Total Attacks	Fatalities	% of Total Fatalities	Average FPA	Median FPA	Injuries	% of Total Injuries	Average IPA	Median IPA
Sub-Saharan Africa	2	2.5%	17	23.3%	8.5	8.5	6	1.7%	3.0	3.0
East Asia	11	13.6%	37	50.7%	3.4	0.0	219	62.2%	19.9	6.0
South Asia	2	2.5%	2	2.7%	1.0	1.0	3	0.9%	1.5	1.5
North America	7	8.6%	4	5.5%	0.6	0.0	11	3.1%	1.6	1.0
Southeast Asia	2	2.5%	1	1.4%	0.5	0.5	1	0.3%	0.5	0.5
Middle East and North Africa	30	37.0%	8	11.0%	0.3	0.0	41	11.6%	1.4	1.0
Western Europe	26	32.1%	4	5.5%	0.2	0.0	69	19.6%	2.7	2.0
Russia and the NIS	1	1.2%	0	0.0%	0.0	0.0	2	0.6%	2.0	2.0
TOTAL/AVERAGES/MEDIANS	81	100%	73	100%	0.9	0.0	352	100%	4.3	1.0

8. Public Surface Transportation by Country – Ranked According to Lethality (Overall Average is 0.9)

Country	Attacks	% of Total Attacks	Fatalities	% of Total Fatalities	Average FPA	Median FPA	Injuries	% of Total Injuries	Average IPA	Median IPA
Cameroon	1	1.2%	11	15.1%	11.0	11.0	6	1.7%	6.0	6.0
Central African Republic	1	1.2%	6	8.2%	6.0	6.0	0	0.0%	0.0	0.0
China	7	8.6%	32	43.8%	4.6	0.0	191	54.3%	27.3	8.0
Taiwan	2	2.5%	4	5.5%	2.0	2.0	25	7.1%	12.5	12.5
India	1	1.2%	2	2.7%	2.0	2.0	0	0.0%	0.0	0.0
Indonesia	1	1.2%	1	1.4%	1.0	1.0	0	0.0%	0.0	0.0
United States	7	8.6%	4	5.5%	0.6	0.0	11	3.1%	1.6	1.0
Japan	2	2.5%	1	1.4%	0.5	0.5	3	0.9%	1.5	1.5
France	5	6.2%	2	2.7%	0.4	0.0	4	1.1%	0.8	0.0
West Bank & Gaza Strip	7	8.6%	2	2.7%	0.3	0.0	5	1.4%	0.7	1.0
Israel	22	27.2%	6	8.2%	0.3	0.0	31	9.1%	1.4	1.0
Germany	9	11.1%	2	2.7%	0.2	0.0	40	11.4%	4.4	3.0
United Kingdom	5	6.2%	0	0.0%	0.0	0.0	9	2.6%	1.8	1.0
Belgium	3	3.7%	0	0.0%	0.0	0.0	6	1.7%	2.0	3.0
Austria	1	1.2%	0	0.0%	0.0	0.0	2	0.6%	2.0	2.0
Bangladesh	1	1.2%	0	0.0%	0.0	0.0	3	0.9%	3.0	3.0
Italy	1	1.2%	0	0.0%	0.0	0.0	3	0.9%	3.0	3.0
Lebanon	1	1.2%	0	0.0%	0.0	0.0	5	1.4%	5.0	5.0

Country	Attacks	% of Total Attacks	Fatalities	% of Total Fatalities	Average FPA	Median FPA	Injuries	% of Total Injuries	Average IPA	Median IPA
Netherlands	1	1.2%	0	0.0%	0.0	0.0	2	0.6%	2.0	2.0
Norway	1	1.2%	0	0.0%	0.0	0.0	3	0.9%	3.0	3.0
Philippines	1	1.2%	0	0.0%	0.0	0.0	1	0.3%	1.0	1.0
Russian Federation	1	1.2%	0	0.0%	0.0	0.0	2	0.6%	2.0	2.0
TOTAL/AVERAGES/MEDIANS	81	100%	73	100%	0.9	0.0	352	100%	4.3	1.0

9. Public Surface Transportation by Target Category

Target Category	Attacks	% of Total Attacks	Fatalities	% of Total Fatalities	Average FPA	Median FPA	Injuries	% of Total Injuries	Average IPA	Median IPA
Train	44	54.3%	47	64.4%	1.1	0.0	275	78.2%	6.3	2.0
Bus	37	45.7%	26	35.6%	0.7	0.0	77	21.8%	2.1	1.0
TOTAL/AVERAGES/MEDIANS	81	100%	73	100%	0.9	0.0	352	100%	4.3	1.0

10. Public Surface Transportation by Target Group

Target Group	Attacks	% of Total Attacks	Fatalities	% of Total Fatalities	Average FPA	Median FPA	Injuries	% of Total Injuries	Average IPA	Median IPA
Passenger Train Stations	27	33.3%	38	52.1%	1.4	0.0	220	62.3%	8.1	3.0
Buses	18	22.2%	22	30.1%	1.2	0.0	58	16.5%	3.2	1.0
Bus Stations or Stops	17	21.0%	4	5.5%	0.2	0.0	17	4.8%	1.0	1.0
Operating or Security Personnel and Facilities	8	9.9%	1	1.4%	0.1	0.0	8	2.3%	1.0	1.0
Passenger Trains	11	13.6%	8	11.0%	0.7	0.0	50	14.2%	4.5	2.0
TOTAL/AVERAGES/MEDIANS	81	100%	73	100%	0.9	0.0	353	100%	4.3	1.0

Table 8 provides a more detailed picture of how the countries rank in terms of lethality. China has the most fatalities, the most injuries. And aside from a single attack in Cameroon and another in the Central African Republic, China also has the highest lethality. The United States ties for 5th in total fatalities with Taiwan and is seventh in lethality, and below the overall lethality rate of 0.9. Both numbers, however, are very small.

As seen in Table 9, stabbing attacks are divided fairly evenly between train and bus targets, with lethality higher in train targets.

A more detailed breakdown in Table 10 by target group shows that most stabbing attacks occur in train stations. Attacks in train stations are also the most lethal and have caused the greatest number of fatalities and injuries. Buses come in second place in most of these same categories, then passenger trains.

Table 11 shows the breakdown of attacks by specific targets ranked by lethality, with certain passenger train targets and buses having higher than average lethality. However, the small numbers reduce confidence in the statistics.

As Table 12 illustrates, Palestinian extremists are responsible for 27 (or 33 percent) of the stabbing attacks but have attained very low lethality. “Mentally Disordered Individuals”—not a specific clinical diagnosis, but a category we have based on public accounts of the attacker having had a history of significant mental disorders or treatment—are also responsible for 26 (or 32 percent) of the stabbing attacks. Similarly, their attacks are seldom fatal.

By far, the most lethal attackers are Uighur extremists in China, with an FPA of 8.0, although the statistics here are driven by a couple of deadly incidents, especially the one cited earlier in Kunming. Attackers motivated by Jihadist ideology rank second in total fatalities and fourth in lethality, with an FPA of 1.9. It should be noted that some of the attackers categorized as “Unknown Group or Individual” were described as Muslim extremists, but it is not known if they were inspired by jihadist ideology or exhortations.

Jihadist-inspired attacks are not always conducted by those working diligently to establish a Caliphate; often, they are conducted by individuals with documented or suspected mental disorders or histories of criminal violence. Ideology may be just one of a constellation of motives.

11. Public Surface Transportation by Target - Ranked According to Lethality

Target	Attacks	% of Total Attacks	Fatalities	% of Total Fatalities	Average FPA	Median FPA	Injuries	% of Total Injuries	Average IPA	Median IPA
Station, Train Passenger - Enclosed	13	16.0%	34	46.6%	2.6	0.0	176	50.0%	13.5	3.0
Train, Subway	2	2.5%	4	5.5%	2.0	2.0	22	6.3%	11.0	11.0
Bus, Scheduled	15	18.5%	21	28.8%	1.4	0.0	54	15.3%	3.6	1.0
Minivan or Minibus, Scheduled	2	2.5%	1	1.4%	0.5	0.5	1	0.3%	0.5	0.5
Station or Stop, Tram or Train Trolley	4	4.9%	2	2.7%	0.5	0.5	4	1.1%	1.0	1.0
Subway Station, Open Air	2	2.5%	1	1.4%	0.5	0.5	2	0.6%	1.0	1.0
Train, Passenger (Intercity or Commuter)	9	11.1%	4	5.5%	0.4	0.0	28	8.0%	3.1	2.0
Bus Stop	10	12.3%	3	4.1%	0.3	0.0	12	3.4%	1.2	1.0
Station, Train Passenger - Unspecified	4	4.9%	1	1.4%	0.3	0.0	26	7.4%	6.5	3.0
Bus Station, Unspecified	6	7.4%	1	1.4%	0.2	0.0	4	1.1%	0.7	1.0
Security Personnel	8	9.9%	1	1.4%	0.1	0.0	8	2.3%	1.0	1.0
Bus Station, Enclosed	1	1.2%	0	0.0%	0.0	0.0	1	0.3%	1.0	1.0
Bus, Tourist	1	1.2%	0	0.0%	0.0	0.0	3	0.9%	3.0	3.0
Subway Station, Enclosed	4	4.9%	0	0.0%	0.0	0.0	11	3.1%	2.8	3.5
TOTAL/AVERAGES/MEDIANS	81	100%	73	100%	0.9	0.0	352	100%	4.3	1.0

12. Public Surface Transportation by General Attacker Group

General Attacker Group	% of Total Attacks		% of Total Fatalities		Average FPA		Median FPA		% of Total Injuries		Average IPA		Median IPA	
	Attacks	% of Total Attacks	Fatalities	% of Total Fatalities	FPA	Average FPA	Median FPA	Injuries	% of Total Injuries	IPA	Average IPA	Median IPA		
Palestinians With No Specific Group	27	33.3%	6	8.2%	0.2	0.2	0.0	32	9.1%	1.2	1.2	1.0		
Mentally-Disordered Individual	26	32.1%	11	15.1%	0.4	0.4	0.0	104	29.5%	4.0	4.0	3.0		
Unknown Group or Individuals	9	11.1%	0	0.0%	0.0	0.0	0.0	22	6.3%	2.4	2.4	3.0		
Jihadist	7	8.6%	13	17.8%	1.9	1.9	0.0	15	4.3%	2.1	2.1	1.0		
Xinjiang Uighur Groups	4	4.9%	32	43.8%	8.0	8.0	0.5	171	48.6%	42.8	42.8	12.5		
Criminal	2	2.5%	0	0.0%	0.0	0.0	0.0	5	1.4%	2.5	2.5	2.5		
White Supremacist/Anti-Muslim	2	2.5%	1	1.4%	0.5	0.5	0.5	1	0.3%	0.5	0.5	0.5		
Assam Groups	1	1.2%	2	2.7%	2.0	2.0	2.0	0	0.0%	0.0	0.0	0.0		
Labor, Consumer or Citizen Actions	1	1.2%	1	1.4%	1.0	1.0	1.0	0	0.0%	0.0	0.0	0.0		
Miscellaneous Groups	1	1.2%	6	8.2%	6.0	6.0	6.0	0	0.0%	0.0	0.0	0.0		
Non-Jihadist Islamic Groups	1	1.2%	1	1.4%	1.0	1.0	1.0	2	0.6%	2.0	2.0	2.0		
TOTAL/AVERAGES/MEDIANS	81	100%	73	100%	0.9	0.9	0.0	352	100%	4.3	4.3	1.0		

Finally, it is worth noting that only two out of 81 attacks (2.4 percent) were clearly or possibly suicidal attacks, and that together they resulted in no fatalities and only three injuries. Clearly, they are less lethal (0.0 FPA) than the overall average of 0.9 FPA for all stabbing attacks. Their percentage (2.4 percent) is far lower than the percentage for all other attacks (4.4%), with their lethality considerably lower: 0.0 FPA instead of 10.1 FPA. Suicide is clearly not a lethality multiplier in stabbing attacks.

LETHALITY MULTIPLIERS – ANOTHER LOOK

Turning to other lethality multipliers, we now take a second look at the effect of the number of attackers and enclosed spaces in public surface transport worldwide, as we did for the attacks against non-transport public targets in Western countries in the last five years. The effects are sometimes different.

As Table 13 shows, while attacks with multiple assailants represent only 15% of all attacks, their lethality is significantly higher than that attained by single attackers. The FPA for these attacks is 4.3 FPA, more than fourteen times that of single assailant attacks (0.3 FPA), and the IPA is 15.0 and six times that of single assailant attacks (2.5 IPA). In contrast, for attacks against non-public surface transport targets in Western countries in the last five years (2014-2018) there was a slight *decrease* in lethality.

13. Effect of Multiple Attackers on Lethality in Public Surface Transport Attacks Worldwide

	All Attacks	Single Assailant	Multiple Assailants	Increase/ Decrease in Lethality
Attacks	81	69	12	
Fatalities	73	21	52	
Injuries	352	172	180	
Fatalities Per Attack (FPA)	0.9	0.3	4.3	4.0
Injuries Per Attack (IPA)	4.3	2.5	15.0	12.5

Turning to the effect of attacks in enclosed versus open environments, we see the opposite effect in Table 14. We define enclosed environments to be buses and trains, and enclosed subway stations. All other public surface transport targets are considered open, including enclosed train stations, which are often large enough to allow people to flee more easily. Here, a larger percentage of attacks are involved (42 percent) but the lethality of these attacks is exactly the same in terms of FPA, and even lower in terms of IPA. In contrast, for attacks against non-public surface transport targets in Western countries since 2014, enclosed spaces significantly increased lethality.

14. Effect of Enclosed Spaces on Lethality in Public Surface Transport Attacks Worldwide

	All Attacks	Open Spaces	Enclosed Spaces	Increase/ Decrease in Lethality
Attacks	81	47	34	
Fatalities	73	43	30	
Injuries	352	232	120	
Fatalities Per Attack (FPA)	0.9	0.9	0.9	4.0
Injuries Per Attack (IPA)	4.3	4.9	3.5	12.5

Finally, we look at the six attacks (totaling 7%) in which multiple attackers operated in enclosed spaces, killing 20 and injuring another 12, for an FPA of 3.3 and an IPA of 2.0. By comparison, single attackers working in open spaces were involved in 41 attacks (totally 51%) killing 43 and injuring 232, for an FPA of 0.9 and an IPA of 4.9. This gives multiple attackers in enclosed spaces an FPA that is over 3.5 times higher than single attackers in open spaces, although an IPA that is lower. Although the numbers are small, it does appear that when multiple attackers operate in enclosed spaces, lethality increases FPA significantly. Lethality also increased in attacks against non-public surface transport targets in Western countries during the last five years (2014-2018), although less significantly.

COMBINING STABBING ATTACKS ON ALL TARGETS

In this final section, we combine the stabbing attacks that have occurred in the last five years (2014–2018) at all public venues in developed countries in Western Europe, Europe, the United States, Canada, Australia, Japan, and Taiwan. There were 37 stabbing attacks on public surface transport targets during this period and 61 stabbing attacks at other venues for a total of 98.

This leads to the observation that transportation venues figure prominently in the minds of those carrying out stabbing attacks. Public surface transportation facilities figure in over a third of the total number of attacks.

Another finding that stands out is that of these 98 attacks, 32 (33 percent of the total) were claimed by Jihadist organizations or clearly motivated by Jihadist converts. If we look only at the lethality of these attacks, we see that the FPA is 0.4. While still small, the lethality increases slightly when jihadists or jihadist-inspiring ideology are involved.

Finally, these attacks have been increasing, with 78 (80 percent of the total) occurring in the last three years alone (2016-18).

If we look at the effect that the number of assailants has on lethality on all of these targets, Table 15 shows that in developed countries the net effect of having more attackers is to *decrease* FPA (from 0.40 to 0.3) and IPA (from 2.3 to 1.9). This is consistent with the finding for attacks on non-public surface transport targets for Western countries during these years, where there was a slight decrease, but contrasts with attacks on public surface transport targets worldwide since 1970, where there was a significant increase.

15. Effect of Multiple Attackers on Lethality in Public Spaces and Public Surface Transport Attacks in Developed Countries

	All Attacks	Single Assailant	Multiple Assailants	Increase/Decrease in Lethality
Attacks	98	82	16	
Fatalities	36	32	4	
Injuries	222	192	30	
Fatalities Per Attack (FPA)	0.4	0.4	0.3	-0.1
Injuries Per Attack (IPA)	2.3	2.3	1.9	-0.5

However, as Table 16 shows, enclosed spaces do increase lethality. The FPA increases from 0.3 to 0.5, and the IPA increases from 1.9 to 2.8. This is consistent with the findings for attacks against non-public transport targets in Western countries during these years, where there was an significant increase in lethality, but not for attacks against public surface transport attacks worldwide since 1970, where there was a slight decrease.

16. Effect of Enclosed Spaces on Lethality in Public Spaces and Public Surface Transport Attacks in Developed Countries

	All Attacks	Open Spaces	Enclosed Spaces	Increase/Decrease in Lethality
Attacks	98	59	39	
Fatalities	36	16	20	
Injuries	222	113	109	
Fatalities Per Attack (FPA)	0.3	0.3	0.5	0.2
Injuries Per Attack (IPA)	2.1	1.9	2.8	0.9

Finally, when we again look only at the four attacks in which there were multiple attackers operating in enclosed spaces, we find only one death and four injuries, a low FPA of 0.25 and an IPA of 0.5. The difference between this and the 47 attacks with single assailants operating in open spaces, killing 13 and injuring 85 for an FPA of 0.28 and an IPA of 1.8, is not that significant.

Therefore, multiple attackers operating in enclosed environments against all public targets in developed countries since 2014 do not increase lethality, while they do slightly against non-public surface transport targets in Western countries, and do so dramatically against public transportation targets worldwide since 1970.

To conclude this discussion, Table 17 illustrates the different effects of the various lethality multipliers in the three data sets, showing attacks, FPA and IPA for each of six lethality multipliers (open spaces, enclosed spaces etc.) and a comparison between lethality of multiple versus single assailants, enclosed versus open spaces, and multiple attackers operating in enclosed spaces versus single attackers operating in open spaces.¹²

In four of the nine comparisons, the multipliers cited above (multiple assailants, enclosed spaces, and multiple assailants in enclosed spaces) decrease rather than increase lethality. In the remaining five comparisons, there is an increase in lethality, sometimes only in fatalities per attack, and sometimes in both fatalities and injuries per attack.

- For attacks against non-public surface transport targets in the last five years in Western countries, lethality increased significantly when attacks took place in enclosed rather than open spaces, and increased somewhat where multiple attackers operated in enclosed spaces.
- For attacks worldwide since 1970 against public surface transport targets, there was a very significant lethality increase when multiple attackers were used in any environment, and also a significant increase when multiple attackers operated in enclosed environments.
- Finally, for attacks against all public targets in developed countries in the last five years, lethality increased when enclosed spaces were used instead of open ones.

Further detailed examination would be required to determine why lethality multipliers are different in the three data sets we have examined. The numbers are small, and one attack, with unique circumstances, in any one set could easily skew results.

17. Percentage Changes for Lethality Multipliers in All Three Data Sets

Lethality and Lethality Multipliers	Non-Public Surface Transport Targets Western Countries 2014-2018			Public Surface Targets All Countries 1970-2018			All Public Targets Developed Countries 2014-2018		
	Attacks	FPA	IPA	Attacks	FPA	IPA	Attacks	FPA	IPA
Overall Attacks and Lethality	61	0.4	1.9	81	0.9	4.3	98	0.4	2.3
Single Assailant Attacks and Lethality	45	0.4	1.9	69	0.3	2.5	82	0.4	2.3
Multiple Assailants Attacks and Lethality	16	0.3	1.9	12	4.3	15.0	16	0.3	1.9
Open Spaces Attacks and Lethality	41	0.2	2.0	47	0.9	4.9	59	0.3	1.9
Enclosed Spaces Attacks and Lethality	19	0.7	1.7	34	0.9	3.5	39	0.5	2.8
Open Spaces-Single Assailant Attacks and Lethality	29	0.2	1.8	41	0.9	4.9	47	0.3	1.8
Enclosed Spaces-Multiple Assailants Attacks and Lethality	4	0.3	0.5	6	3.3	2.0	4	0.3	0.5
Comparison in Fatalities Per Attack (FPA) and Injuries Per Attack (IPA)									
Multiple versus Single Assailant		0.75	1.0		14.3	6.0		0.8	0.8
Enclosed versus Open Spaces		3.5	0.9		1.0	0.7		1.7	1.5
Multiple-Enclosed versus Single-Open		1.5	0.3		3.7	0.4		1.0	0.3

CONCLUSIONS

Stabbings are a common crime worldwide and have been so centuries. Most attacks are connected with domestic quarrels, unpremeditated confrontations that turn violent, gang battles, or street muggings. What appears to be new is the growing number of random assaults on uniformed authority figures (police or soldiers) or on multiple random victims in public places.

Although these represent only a tiny fraction of the thousands of ordinary stabbings and other knife crimes, public attacks attract more media attention and give the impression of a growing volume of stabbings overall, which is not the case.

Public attacks reflect two overlapping phenomena. The first, exhortations by jihadist groups to their followers to carry out easy-to-do stabbing attacks, and the second, mentally-disordered individuals who may be encouraged by these same exhortations to violence or by the media coverage given to other stabbing events, thus creating a copycat effect. While jihadist inspiration accounts for most of the attacks in the West, anti-Muslim sentiments also figure as a motive.

The distinction between terrorists and mentally disordered attackers is often unclear and is further blurred in the resulting media coverage. This is not intended to imply that those suffering from mental disorders are a dangerous portion of the population. The numbers are indeed small.

Although body count is a frequent objective of terrorists, stabbing is not an especially effective terrorist tactic. The average number of fatalities per attack is far less than one, although assailants are able to injure an average of two or more persons per attack. Nonetheless, the public and random nature of such attacks command attention and contribute significantly to public fear. Also, the fact that recent attacks are more concentrated in Israel and in Western Europe, which gives them greater saliency in Western countries.

Surface transportation facilities figure prominently among the venues for stabbing attacks during the past five years, but again, the total numbers are small.

Stabbing attacks, along with vehicle rammings and shootings (in countries where guns are readily available) by individual homegrown jihadists, represent a *horizontal escalation* of terrorism—a kind of “pure terrorism”. By inspiring volunteers to do whatever they can wherever they are, to strike the public in places where they cannot depend on protection, terrorist leaders hope that volume and the appearance of ubiquity will compensate for declining strategic capabilities.

The flaw in this strategy is, that so far, remote incitement does not produce a volume of attacks required to maintain a high level of alarm.

ENDNOTES

1. Al Hayat Media Center, English Translation of an Address by Amarul-Muminin, Shaykh Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, *And Give Glad Tidings to Those Who Are Patient*, August 22, 2018; see also The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, *in a public statement by ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the first in a year, he calls on his supporters to carry out terrorist attacks worldwide, mainly in Western countries. He mentions shooting, stabbing and ramming attacks as well as detonation of IEDs*. August 26, 2018. <https://www.terrorism-info.org.il/en/microsoft-wordin-public-statement-isis-leader-abu-bakr-al-baghdadi-first-year-calls-supporters-carry-terrorist-attacks-worldwide-mainly-western-countries-ment/>.
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11. These 81 attacks are 1.4% of the 5,626 attacks during this period, when rail and road infrastructure targets are included.
12. A value that is above 1.0 indicates that lethality is greater, and a value below 1.0 means it is less. For example: 1.0 means lethality has not changed, 6.0 means that lethality is six times what it was before; and 0.75 means lethality is 3/4ths of what it was before.

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