



Algemene Inlichtingen- en
Veiligheidsdienst
*Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en
Koninkrijksrelaties*

Insight into targets

Fifteen years of jihadist attacks in the West



Cover photo:

12 December 2016, Christmas market, Berlin

A man drives a stolen lorry into a crowd at a busy Christmas market in the German capital of Berlin. Twelve people are killed and about fifty more are injured. The perpetrator of the attack flees. He is shot and killed on 23 December 2016 in a suburb of the Italian city of Milan.

For a full overview of the attacks that were carried out in the West in the past fifteen years, see the timeline on aivd.nl/aanslagen.

The AIVD regularly publishes reports that analyse developments in the world against the framework of our current intelligence investigations. With these publications the AIVD wishes to contribute to the public debate on specific topics. AIVD publications describe general trends which may vary in individual cases.

Introduction

The West as a target

One of the most prominent forms of threat faced by Western countries in recent years is the threat posed by jihadist terrorist persons and groups. There have been jihadist terrorist attacks in several Western countries and in some cases attacks have been foiled by intervening authorities. The Netherlands is also a potential target country for jihadist persons and groups, and it has been mentioned as such in propaganda by ISIS and al-Qaeda in the past years.

The jihadist terrorist threat is characterised by a great diversity of potential targets. The aim of this publication is to provide insight in the targets of jihadist terrorism by studying the jihadist terrorist attacks in the West of the past fifteen years. This publication therefore does not focus on the perpetrators of jihadist terrorist attacks, but on their targets.

This publication offers an insight into the actual attacks of the past fifteen years and is not intended to offer insight into the current or future threat on these (or other) targets.

Jihadist terrorist aims

Terrorists carry out attacks for a variety of reasons. This publication relates to violent acts and attacks carried out for jihadist terrorist aims. The definitions of the terms 'jihadism' and 'terrorism' are open to discussion, which consequently has a bearing on the criteria for classifying an attack as jihadist terrorism. For that reason it is important to give clear descriptions of the definitions on which this target analysis is based.

The AIVD defines terrorism as the ideologically motivated actual or threatened violence against persons, property, or the fabric of society, with the aim of bringing about social change, creating fear amongst the population, or influencing the political decision-making process.

In selecting terrorist attacks for this publication, the determining factor has been whether the motivation for the violent act stemmed from (aspects of) radical Islamist or jihadist Salafist ideology. Examples are: (contributing to) the (violent) struggle against the West, the defence of Islam against (perceived) enemies, the countering of Western influence and (military) interventions in Islamic countries, the striving for the establishment of a 'caliphate' and/or the introduction of the Sharia.

In everyday language, such attacks are generally referred to as 'jihadist attacks' or 'terrorist attacks'. For the sake of readability, this publication will simply refer to these as 'attacks'.

Although attacks are and were carried out all over the world, this publication specifically looks at attacks in Western countries, i.e. Western Europe, North America, and Australia, in the period from January 2004 until December 2018.

Targets

The jihadist terrorist threat¹

The jihadist terrorist threat in the West is predominantly constituted by the activities of the groups Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) and al-Qaeda (AQ), and networks and individual sympathisers affiliated with these groups. Attacks by ISIS as well as al-Qaeda can be divided into three categories: leadership-directed attacks, attacks encouraged by members of ISIS or AQ, and attacks inspired by these groups. In the past few years, inspired attacks have become an increasingly substantial part of the jihadist terrorist threat in the West.

ISIS in particular has been successful at mobilising and inspiring sympathisers in the West to carry out attacks in its name. From 2014 on, the ISIS leadership began to issue calls for such attacks. The major attacks in Paris (November 2015) and Brussels (March 2016) were still planned, prepared and directed by ISIS leadership, but since then ISIS has been less and less capable of carrying out centrally directed and coordinated attacks in the West. The group has instead become more dependent on relatively small-scale attacks by sympathisers.

Attacks by al-Qaeda and its affiliated networks and sympathisers can also be categorised as directed, encouraged, or inspired attacks. The last successful attack in the West that can be attributed to (one of the 'branches' of) al-Qaeda attack was the attack on the Charlie Hebdo offices in Paris (January 2015). Al-Qaeda has proven to be much less successful than ISIS at mobilising sympathisers for attacks, but it does call upon sympathisers to carry out attacks in the same manner as ISIS. Al-Qaeda also still harbours the intention of carrying out large-scale attacks against symbolic Western targets.

¹ See also the AIVD publication *Syria's Legacy, Global jihadism remains a threat to Europe*, November 2018.

Target selection

Goal

Several factors play a role in target selection. Firstly there is the goal that the terrorists strive to obtain by carrying out the attack. An attack is never an end in and of itself, but a means to (contribute to) obtaining some other goal. By using violence and causing victims, thus generating media attention, terrorists aim to bring about social change and to cause fear among the population, or to influence political decision-making processes. The ideological motivation of terrorists plays a role in this: their aim could be to contribute to some long-term goal, such as the establishment of a global 'caliphate', but it could also be a more concrete short-term goal, such as to influence political decision-making.

Incidentally, it does not always become clear which 'higher goal' an attack actually served. Claims by terrorist groups are not always reliable, statements by perpetrators are subject to change, and sometimes the legitimisation of an act is devised only after the fact. Nor does this goal have to be well-articulated or well-construed. A lone actor answering a call to carry out attacks could also wish to support the supposed fight against the West in a general sense and see his act of violence as a personal contribution to that struggle. There is thus not always an underlying coherent ideology.

Capability

The second factor that has an influence on target selection is the terrorists' potential to carry out a particular kind of attack. This potential is determined by the available knowledge, means, and opportunity to successfully carry out an attack on the selected target. An individual or network with limited knowledge and expertise will sooner choose to carry out a relatively simple attack on an unprotected target. Larger networks with knowledge, means and finances at their disposal can opt for large-scale attacks, like the 11 September

2001 attacks in the US. The selection of the target can be either 'target-centric', in which case the attack method is selected on the basis of the chosen target, or 'capability-centric', when the target is selected on the basis of the available knowledge, means, and opportunity. Often the target is selected before the method of attack is. Particularly in cases where it is estimated that the available knowledge and means will not be sufficient to carry out a successful attack, target selection will be capability-centric. In these cases, the perpetrators choose another target, a practice also known as target substitution.

In both cases, already implemented security measures play a role. In this regard, targets can be classified as 'hard targets', meaning well-protected targets, or as 'soft targets', meaning targets with little to no (possibility for) protection. The feasibility of an attack, and with that the chances of success, are important to terrorists. When they have a target in mind, they will therefore collect information and carry out one or more scouting missions, also to identify any security measures that are in place. These missions can either be physical, where the target is studied in real life, or virtual, through the internet. Should the conclusion be that security measures stand in the way of a successful attack, terrorists may either choose a new target or a different method of attack. New security measures at airports, for example, have prompted terrorists to seek and develop new methods and attack means in order to strike civil aviation.

Inspiration

A third factor at play in target selection, in particular in the case of undirected attack plans by lone actors or by autonomous networks, is the inspiration (potential) terrorists receive from others. Jihadists can choose from a variety of (online) jihadist literature and videos in which targets are designated as 'legitimate' and helpful tips are provided on how to carry out an attack

against the target in question. On a regular basis leaders of jihadist networks also call for attacks against specific targets. Such calls could also inspire (potential) terrorists to select a particular target for their attack. Additionally terrorists can receive ideas for attacks on social media (for example in chat groups). Lastly, terrorists may be prompted to select a particular target because they are inspired by previous successful attacks (also referred to as copycat behaviour).

Target categories

As mentioned in the introduction, the jihadist terrorist threat is characterised by a great diversity in potential targets. In this publication, potential targets are assigned to target categories. These target categories are all 'conceivable targets', based on the fact that they have either been the target of an attack in the past, have been explicitly mentioned as a target by jihadist terrorist organisations, have been considered as a target in an attack plan, or are considered by the AIVD as a potential target within the context of radical Islamist or jihadist Salafist ideology.

Public locations

The categories under 'public locations' concern crowds at freely accessible outdoor public locations, for example on a street or a square, or a freely accessible building, such as a shop (or shopping centre), bar, or restaurant. Characteristic of these targets is that the victims are random passers-by or people present at the location. These attacks are, therefore, untargeted. The attack is not so much directed at a specific person or object, but occurs at a certain location with the aim of causing (many) random casualties. Furthermore for targets such as these it is difficult, if not impossible, to secure them against terrorist attacks without compromising their accessibility.

Political or government targets

A number of target categories can be brought together under the heading 'government and public authorities'. Jihadists consider government targets to be legitimate targets. This applies particularly to government targets that are related to security, defence, and counterterrorism. Western politicians and government targets have been mentioned explicitly more than once in publications by terrorist groups and in calls for attacks by jihadist leaders. The category 'government' concerns people (representatives, members of government and other politicians) as well as buildings (parliament, government buildings). These are legitimate targets for jihadists because they bear political responsibility for military interventions in Islamic countries, and for policies concerning Islam, migration, etcetera. Where public authorities are concerned, targets include military personnel (and military locations) and police officers, both of whom are visible representatives of the (in this case Western) state security apparatus. There is a marked difference between attacks on political representatives on the one hand and the military and police on the other. In the case of the first, the attack is directed at the person in question, because they are held personally accountable for something they did, whereas attacks against the military and the police are directed at the authority they represent. Such attacks are not personal but are rather attacks on a uniform. The categories diplomatic targets, royalty, and European institutions also fall under the heading 'government and public authorities'.

Events and tourism

The heading 'events' covers incidental or periodically recurring (large-scale) public events, such as sporting events, concerts, festivals, markets (including Christmas markets) and festivities such as carnival. Targets like these are perceived by jihadists as exponents of the 'Western lifestyle' and they are appealing as potential targets because they attract large crowds. Events can be subdivided into

locations with access control (for example at a stadium) and locations without access control (for example a market). The latter are more difficult to secure and because they take place in publicly accessible locations, they are very vulnerable to attacks. Under the heading of 'tourism' we find tourist attractions and hotels. Tourist attractions in particular constitute appealing potential targets because they attract large crowds.



7 January 2015, Charlie Hebdo, Paris

Two men force their way into the Paris-based editorial office of French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo. They shoot and kill eleven people and cause eleven more casualties, in addition to killing a police officer on the street. After a police manhunt and a hostage situation in Dammartin-en-Goële, the perpetrators are shot and killed by the police on 9 January.

For a full overview of the attacks that were carried out in the West in the past fifteen years, see the timeline on aivd.nl/aanslagen.

Transportation

The heading 'transportation' includes a number of target categories: public transport (trains, the underground, buses and trams, stations included), airports and civil aviation, sea ports and shipping, cruise ships and ferries. All these cases constitute potential attack targets because of the presence of large groups of people. The category of civil aviation falls roughly into two parts: airplanes and the secure areas of airports (hard target) and the public spaces in and around airports (soft target). Both are potential targets, but attacks against the less secure areas of airports are more likely to occur than a much less easily feasible attack against an airplane.

Financial economic targets and vital processes

The heading 'financial economic targets' includes banks and stock exchanges. Also the corporate world and business people in the broadest sense fall under this heading. In the past, a number of well-known, generally American, business persons have been mentioned as legitimate targets by jihadist terrorist groups. A number of potential targets falls into the category 'vital processes and services'. These concern sectors like the power and drinking water supply and the nuclear sector. Jihadists have shown an interest in targeting these sectors, but this interest has never progressed to the stage of an actual threat, usually because the chances of success were deemed to be slim.

Religious targets and 'enemies of Islam'

'Religious targets' too constitute potential targets for attacks. These involve not just Jewish targets (which are, within the context of jihadist ideology, legitimate targets), but also churches, temples, and mosques. A separate group of people that could find themselves targets of jihadist terrorist attacks are those individuals that are perceived as 'enemies of Islam'. These include blasphemers (people who have offended the prophet Mohammed), well-known 'apostates' or former Muslims, and opinion leaders accused of 'anti-Islam' views. The first two

categories have been mentioned explicitly in past publications by terrorist groups and in calls for attacks by jihadist leaders.

Other targets

Other persons that could be counted as potential targets, are security personnel, prison staff, and people (but also objects and events) that belong to the LGBTQIA² community. Other objects that constitute potential targets are courts, international organisations (such as international courts and tribunals), the media, education (schools and universities), and hospitals and health care centres. Of these categories, the media and schools have been mentioned explicitly in the past as legitimate targets by jihadist terrorist groups.

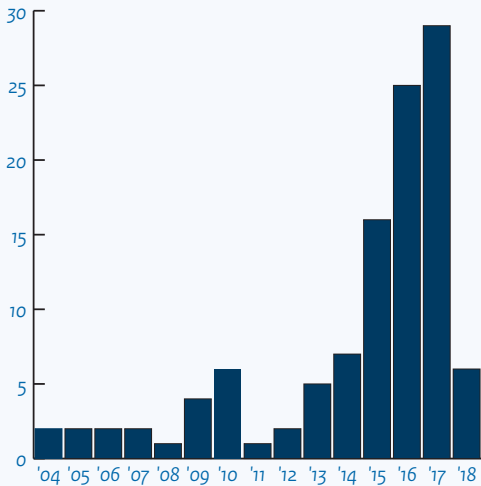
² LGBTQIA stands for Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer Intersex Asexual.

Number of attacks

There have been 112 radical Islamist and jihadist Salafist terrorist attacks in the West in the past fifteen years. The timeline shows the rise and fall of the number of attacks in the past fifteen years. Of all the attacks, 80% was committed by a single perpetrator.

The first ten years of this period show that each year a relatively small number of attacks took place in the West, with a slight peak in 2009/2010. The past five years show a steep rise in the number of attacks in the West, followed by a strong decline in 2018. Of all attacks carried out in the past fifteen years, no less than three-quarters occurred in the past five years. This coincides with the rise of ISIS and the fact that from 2014 onward ISIS leadership began to call on its sympathisers in the West to carry out attacks. The strong decline in the number of attacks in 2018 follows the fall of the caliphate proclaimed by ISIS, and the fact that the organisation had lost much of its strength.

Graph 1: Number of attacks



It is not merely the higher number of attacks in the past five years that distinguishes this period from the preceding ten years. The geographical distribution, the choice of targets, and the methods used have also changed in the past five years. In what follows, this publication will therefore at various points differentiate between the attacks of the first ten years and those of the last five.

Spread over the year

The 112 attacks in the West occurred throughout the entire year, although the number of attacks carried out from May to September 2018 was relatively higher than in the period from October to April (54% as opposed to 46%). The past fifteen years have not seen a rise in the number of attacks surrounding Christian holidays.

Of the 112 attacks that took place in the West, 13% occurred during Ramadan. In the first ten years, only one attack took place during Ramadan (the murder of Theo van Gogh in the Netherlands on 2 November 2004), against 16% of attacks taking place during Ramadan in the past five years. This shift of the past five years coincides with the rise of ISIS. From 2015 onwards, ISIS called on its sympathisers each year to carry out attacks during Ramadan. Still, of only one attack that was carried out during Ramadan (the attack on a police officer and his family in France in 2016) do we know that the perpetrator explicitly planned the attack to take place in the month of Ramadan. Furthermore, the main share of attacks in the West occurred outside of Ramadan.



22 March 2016, Zaventem Airport, Brussels

At Zaventem airport in Belgian capital Brussels, two men carry out suicide attacks in short succession. At least ten people are killed and over a hundred are injured. A third bomb detonated later causes no casualties. About an hour later, another suicide attack is carried out in a metro carriage at Maelbeek metro station (near the European quarter). This attack results in at least twenty fatalities and thirty casualties.

For a full overview of the attacks that were carried out in the West in the past fifteen years, see the timeline on aivd.nl/aanslagen.

Outcome of the attacks

Succeeded versus failed

Of the 112 attacks in the West in the past fifteen years, 76% can be considered succeeded, meaning that they were actually carried out and resulted in casualties and/or damage.³ The other 24% can be deemed failed; these attacks did not obtain the intended effect (damage or casualties), for example because explosives failed to detonate. In this regard too there has been a shift in the past fifteen years. During the first ten years of that period, half of all attacks succeeded, and half failed. In the past five years, however, the percentage of success has risen

³ To jihadists, perpetrating an attack and thereby causing fear among the population is considered a success even when there are few or no victims or little to no damage. For this publication, however, we follow the definition given here.

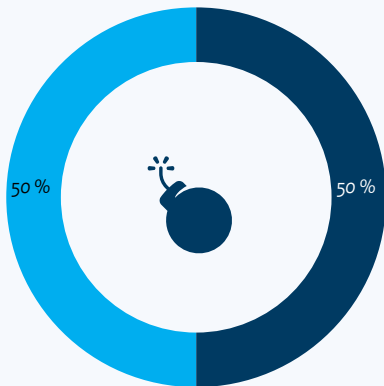
to 84%. So, not only have there been more attacks in the West in the past five years (three-quarters of all attacks of the past fifteen years), but these attacks also succeeded more often.

Casualties

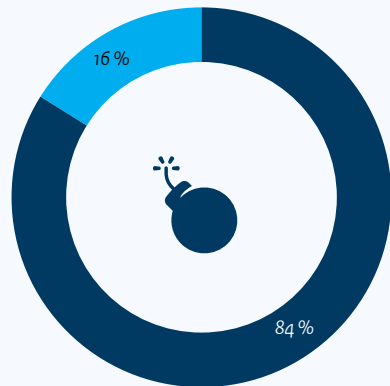
There is a general perception that jihadist terrorists primarily strive to inflict as many casualties as possible. However, this is just one of their goals, and there is no consensus within jihadist terrorist circles about the question whether it is permitted to claim as many (innocent) victims as possible, or which casualties would be legitimate. ISIS propaganda mentions public locations where crowds of people are gathered (such as events) as suitable targets. AQ on the other hand explicitly advises against attacks in public locations, because that might cause Muslim casualties as well.

Graph 2: Results

2004 - 2013

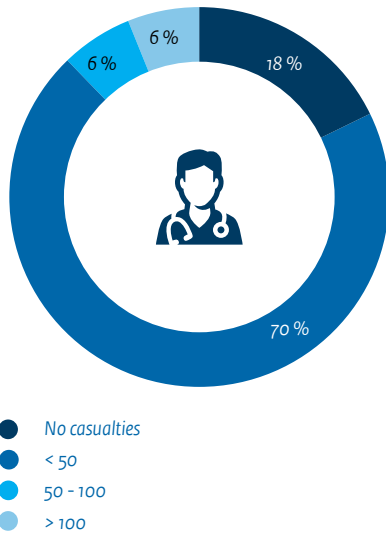


2014 - 2018



● Succeeded
● Failed

Graph 3: Casualties



In the past fifteen years there have been several attacks in the West that were plainly intended to cause large numbers of casualties, and the impact of such attacks is enormous. Still, these kinds of attacks are fairly rare: in the past fifteen years there have been seven attacks (6% of the total) that caused over a hundred casualties. The vast majority of attacks (70%) caused fewer than fifty casualties, 6% involved between fifty and a hundred casualties, and in 18% of attacks in the West there were no casualties at all.

Geographical distribution

In the past fifteen years, fourteen Western countries have had to deal with attacks: Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Finland, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Austria, Spain, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Sweden. Of these countries, France has had to bear the brunt of jihadist terrorism: 27% of all attacks in the West took place there. France is followed by the United States (20%), and then the United Kingdom (13%), and Germany (10%). In total, 70% of all attacks of the past fifteen years in the West took place in these four countries.

The geographical distribution of attacks has shifted significantly in the course of those fifteen years. During the first ten years, the United Kingdom was targeted the most in attacks; in that period, a quarter of attacks occurred there. After the UK comes the United States with 18%, followed by France and Germany (11% each). This distribution is quite different when one considers the past five years, in which three-quarters of all attacks of the past fifteen years occurred. Of these attacks, no less than 32% took place in France. This means that the number of attacks in France strongly increased in the past five years both in terms of absolute numbers and in a relative sense. France's 'leading position' for the past fifteen years is to a large extent due to the great number of attacks that this country had to face in the last five years (the first jihadist terrorist attack in France did not occur until 2012). In the United States 20% of all attacks took place in the past five years, followed by Germany (10%), and the United Kingdom (8%), which in the preceding ten years had to deal with a quarter of all attacks.

Not just capital cities

Although in recent years a number of large attacks took place in capital cities (Madrid, London, Paris, Brussels), the majority of the attacks occurred

outside of the Western capitals. Of the 112 attacks in the past 15 years, 41% took place in the capital of the country in question, and in 59% the attack site was outside of the capital.

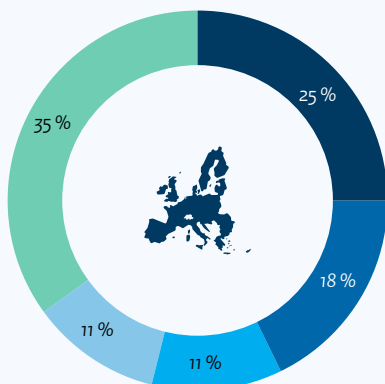
Attacks in the country in question

On the basis of the attacks in the West in the past fifteen years it is possible to conclude that when jihadists intend to strike a country by means of an attack (and wish to do so in the West itself, and not in a conflict zone) they will practically always carry out the attack in the country in question. There are almost no instances of attacks on targets of a Western country that take place in a different Western country. Only one attack out of 112 fits this description: the shooting of US military personnel at Frankfurt airport in 2011. The targeted country in this attack was the United States, whereas the attack

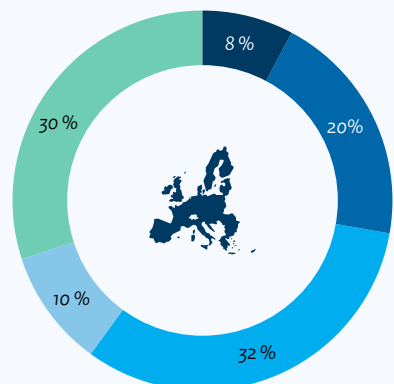
site was Germany. But, as mentioned, this is an exception. One could argue that although the attack at Zaventem airport in 2016 took place at a Belgian airport, the explosives were intentionally detonated next to the desks of two American airlines. In addition, the suspect of the 2015 Thalys attack has stated that the members of the US military on the train were the target, but it has not (yet) been established whether this was indeed the case.

Graph 4: Geographic distribution

2004 - 2013



2014 - 2018



- United Kingdom
- United States
- France
- Germany
- Other countries

Targets hit

For this publication, the targets of jihadist terrorist attacks have been divided into forty target categories. The attacks carried out in the West during that time were aimed at a great variety of targets.

Recurring targets

When considering the whole fifteen-year period, 30% of all attacks in the West occurred in freely accessible public locations where the victims were random passers-by or other people present in the area. In the majority of cases these were exterior locations like streets and squares, and in a small number of cases the location was a freely accessible building like a shopping centre or restaurant. Police officers were the target in 21% of attacks, while 15% of attacks targeted the military. Different from attacks against random persons at public locations, these last two categories are directed at very specific targets.

As before, however, this picture does not apply to the whole of the fifteen-year period; also in terms of targets there is a manifest shift. During the first ten years of this period, a quarter of the attacks in the West targeted the military. In shared second place for these ten years we find three target categories targeted in 18% of attacks: public locations, public transport, and blasphemers – persons who, from a Muslim perspective, have offended the prophet Mohammed.

In the last five years jihadists made different choices in target selection. During this period, in which three-quarters of all attacks in the West took place, 35% targeted public locations, 29% targeted police officers, and 12% targeted the military. This is quite a different picture from previous years.

Uniformed personnel

There is something to be said for considering police officers and the military as a single target category, in that both are uniformed, visible, and recognis-

able representatives of the state's security apparatus, and both fulfil security tasks in public and at protected locations, events, etcetera. To a jihadist, attacking a police officer or a member of the military does not make a great deal of difference, and sometimes the distinction is not entirely clear. The perpetrator of the attack in the French town of Trèbes in March 2018 had initially planned to attack the military at a nearby army base, but when he did not come across any members of the military at that barracks, he switched target and shot police officers at a police barracks.

If police officers and the military are considered as a single target category ('uniformed personnel') it becomes clear that together, they constitute the most frequently targeted category: no less than 36% of all attacks in the West was directed at uniformed personnel. In the first ten years this percentage was 25% and in the last five years this rose sharply to 41%. Moreover, attacks on police officers are a relatively recent phenomenon: the first jihadist terrorist attack on a police officer in the West took place just four years ago.

Causing mass casualties is not the only goal of terrorist attacks and the target selections. Even in the years 2015, 2016 and 2017, when the number of attacks (some with significant numbers of casualties) against the West spiked dramatically, there were more attacks against uniformed personnel than attacks against public locations (27 against 22). Clearly attacks against officials that symbolise the Western state security apparatus are just as much a factor in target selection as maximising the number of casualties. For both target categories the attack success rate was high: 83% of the attacks on public locations and on uniformed personnel was successful.

Blasphemers

The murder of the Dutch film maker Theo van Gogh in 2004 was the first attack in the West that targeted an alleged blasphemer. At the time this was still

uncommon. Following the Danish ‘cartoon crisis’ of 2005/2006, attacks targeting those who have offended the prophet have become more frequent. Remarkably, in all cases the targets could be related to the fact of making or publishing cartoons of the prophet. Of the attacks on blasphemers, 37% succeeded and 63% failed. This can partially be explained by the fact that in a number of cases the individuals in question were under protection. After 2015, when three attacks against alleged blasphemers took place, there were no further attacks against this target category. There was an attack in the Netherlands in 2018 in which there was a link to Mohammed cartoons, in this case the Mohammed cartoon contest announced by Geert Wilders. The perpetrator of this attack stated that he travelled to the Netherlands specifically to avenge this affront to the prophet.

Less frequent targets

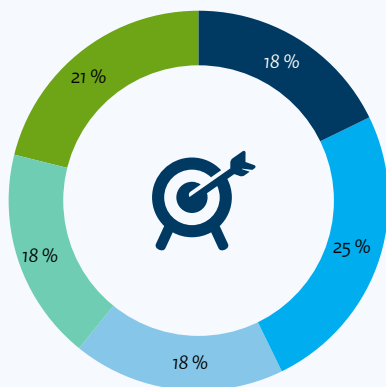
An analysis of hit targets also shows that in the past fifteen years, some targets have been hit less frequently than might have been expected.

Events

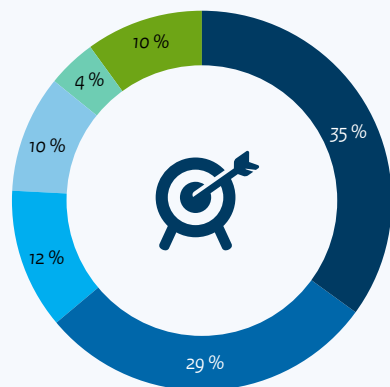
Only in 6% of the 112 attacks of the past fifteen years was the target an event. In six out of these seven cases, the events were public and without security: a marathon (US, 2013), a fireworks show (France, 2016), a running competition (US, 2016) and three Christmas markets (Germany, 2016 and France, 2018). These are events of a public nature, held at freely accessible, public locations. Such events, which are very common in Western countries, are by their nature very vulnerable to terrorist attacks; they attract crowds, which could lead to high

Graph 5: Recurring targets

2004 - 2013



2014 - 2018



- Public locations
- Police officers
- Military
- Public transport
- Blasphemers
- Other

casualty numbers, and generally speaking there is little to no security. ISIS propaganda also explicitly singles out such events as suitable targets. For these reasons it is quite remarkable that events have been selected as targets only on fairly few occasions.

In addition to freely accessible events, there are also frequent events in Western countries where there is some form of access control, such as at concerts and festivals. In the past fifteen years there have been two attacks against such an event: the combined attack in Paris in 2015 and the attack at a pop concert in the UK in 2017. The latter of the two did not take place in the secured area where the concert was taking place, but in a public area outside of the location after the concert had ended.

Civil aviation

Attacks directed at civil aviation would cause significant numbers of casualties and extensive damage, and for that reason this sector is subject to extensive security measures in the West. This may explain why only 3% of all attacks of the past fifteen years targeted civil aviation. These attacks took place in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Belgium. Two attacks were directed at airports, and in one case a (failed) attack took place on board an airplane.

Jewish targets

In the past fifteen years, less than 5% of all jihadist terrorist attacks in the West involved a target with Jewish connotations (in France, Belgium and Denmark). Jewish targets are seen as legitimate from the jihadist perspective (Israel is perceived as one of the greatest enemies, together with the US). Although Jewish targets do have to deal with various, often violent, incidents on a regular basis, in most cases these stem from anti-Semitic motives or are related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Other religious targets, like churches, temples, and mosques, were targets of jihadist terrorism in the West in 3% of cases.

Not targeted

There are certain targets that were not targeted in the West in the past fifteen years. There were no attacks directed at diplomatic objects or diplomats in Western countries, royalty, or European institutions. Nor have there been attacks against banks and stock exchanges, or against cruise ships and ferries. With the exception of civil aviation, there were also no attacks directed at vital infrastructure such as gas or electricity supply or the nuclear sector. Courts, tourist attractions, hotels, international organisations, schools and hospitals have similarly been spared in the past fifteen years.

One important caveat applies to the above: the fact that these targets have not been hit in the past years, does not mean that they are not potential targets. All the targets discussed here are legitimate targets to jihadist terrorist individuals and groups. Many of the targets discussed have also been designated specifically as such, for example in jihadist literature and propaganda videos, or mentioned by leaders of jihadist groups. A number of targets that have been spared in the past fifteen years, were in fact under consideration as targets at some point during an attack's preparatory phase.

Differences between countries

There are also geographical differences in jihadist terrorist target selection, with jihadists in one country selecting targets different from those selected in other countries. In the United States, 41% of all attacks in the past fifteen years were directed at public locations, 18% at police officers and 14% at the military. In the United Kingdom, on the other hand, public transport together with public locations were the targets hit most often (both 29%), followed in third place by political targets, with 21%.

Western politicians have been mentioned explicitly in the past in publications by terrorist groups and by jihadist leaders calling for attacks. To jihadists, they are legitimate targets as they bear the political responsibility for, for example, military interventions in Islamic countries. Still, only two countries have suffered attacks against political or government targets in the past fifteen years, namely the United Kingdom and Canada.

Strikingly, military personnel and police officers were targeted much less often in the United Kingdom than in other countries in the top 4. In France, police officers and military personnel were the targets most often hit (30% and 27% respectively), followed by public locations (20%). In Germany, public transport was hit most often (27%), followed by police officers, public locations, and – remarkably – events (18% each). The question which targets were most often targeted in jihadist terrorism is therefore answered differently for each Western country.

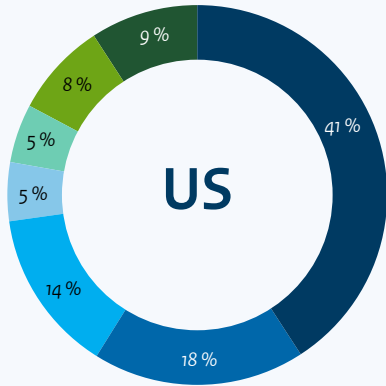
If we look at where the most attacks on uniformed personnel took place, then most attacks by far against this target category occurred in France (41%), followed at some distance by the United States (17%). In the United Kingdom, Germany,

Belgium, Canada, and Italy too uniformed personnel was a target, but to a much lesser extent. In the majority of cases of attacks against uniformed personnel the victims were military staff and police officers recognisable as such because of their uniform, and in a public location at the time of the attack.

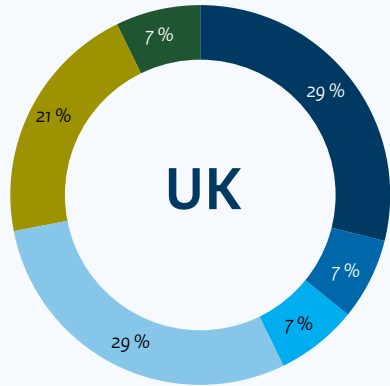
In the past fifteen years, Denmark has had to contend with the most attacks – half of the total number of attacks in this category – against blasphemers. This can be explained: most of these attacks were related to the publication of Mohammed cartoons in the Danish daily newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* in 2005 and the artist behind the most infamous cartoon (Kurt Westergaard) lives in Denmark. Other attacks against blasphemers occurred in the United States, France, Sweden, and the Netherlands.

Graph 6: Differences between the four countries hit most often

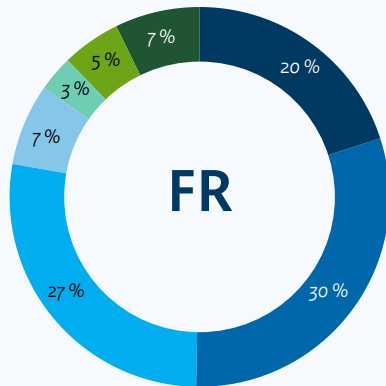
United States



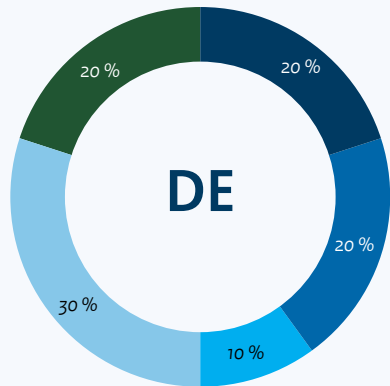
United Kingdom



France



Germany



- Public locations
- Police officers
- Military
- Public transport
- Blasphemers
- Other
- Politicians and parliament
- Events

Means of attack

In the 112 attacks carried out in the West in the past fifteen years, five different means of attack were used: explosives, firearms, stabbing weapons, striking weapons, and vehicles. In a few instances, the attacks involved arson, hostage taking and decapitation as method of operation.

In the past fifteen years, 41% of all attacks was committed with a stabbing weapon, such as a knife. For 26% of attacks, explosives, such as IEDs (improvised explosive devices), and pipe bombs were used. In a quarter of cases, a firearm was the means of attack.

The method of operation for attacks in the West has also changed in the course of these fifteen years. During the first ten years, explosives were by far the most frequent means of attack. No less than 54% of all attacks in that period were carried out with the use of explosives. Firearms came second (29%) and stabbing weapons were in third place (18%).

This has changed considerably in the past five years. Stabbing weapons have become the preferred means of attack: 48% of all attacks of the past five years were carried out with a stabbing weapon. In 24% of cases a firearm was used, and in 17% of the attacks a vehicle was used as the attack means. Over the past five years the percentage of attacks in which explosives were used, fell from 54% to 17%. This observed shift in attack means correlates with the changing threat perspective of the past five years, in which the focus came to lie on inspired attacks by sympathisers.

Vehicles

A relatively new development that occurred in the past five years is the use of vehicles as means of attack. Attacks using vehicles are carried out not only by jihadists, but also for example by those on the far right (London, Charlottesville) and people who are not motivated by any specific ideology in

their attack (the 2009 Queen's Day attack in the Netherlands).

The first time a jihadist used a vehicle to carry out an attack was in the United States in 2006. It was not until 2014 that the second attack with a vehicle took place, but in 2016 and 2017 the number of attacks by vehicle increased greatly. In 2016, there were four instances of the use of a vehicle to carry out attacks, and in 2017 there were nine. This sharp increase in the use of vehicles as a means of attack correlates with the sharp increase in the number of attacks of the past five years. The fact that the number of attacks using a vehicle has fallen to a single attack in 2018, also fits this trend.

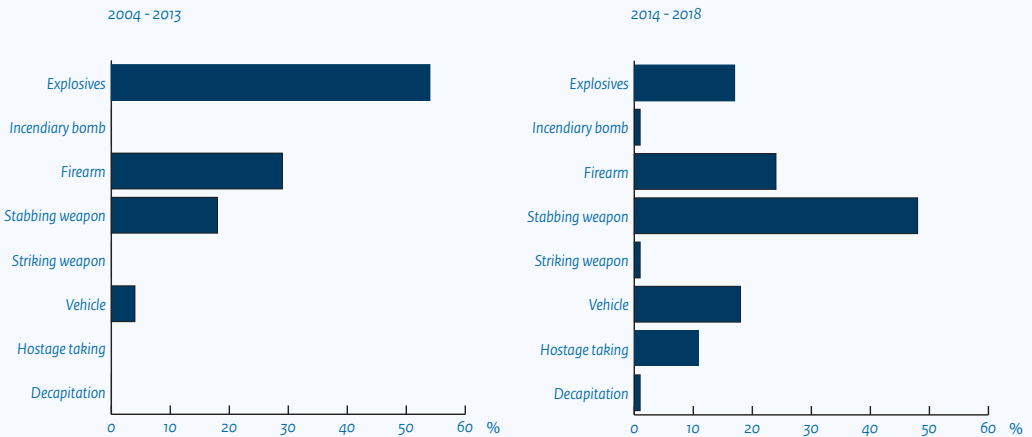
Hostage-taking and decapitation

The second development is that in 11% of the attacks of the past five years, hostages were taken; all cases of hostage-taking by jihadist terrorists in the West occurred during the last five years. Decapitation as a method of attack hardly ever occurs in the West: in the past fifteen years only two attack plots featured plans to decapitate people, but actual decapitation took place in only one case, in June 2015 in France. This was the first (and so far only) successful decapitation by jihadists in a Western country.

CBRN and drones

Jihadist terrorists have not used any chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear (CBRN) means for attacks in the West. The AIVD does hold information that in certain cases jihadists have expressed an interest in such unconventional means of attack. The same applies to the use of UAVs (unmanned aerial vehicles) or drones as a means of delivery (strictly speaking a drone is not a means of attack in itself). Jihadists have never carried out attacks in the West in which a drone was used.

Graph 7: Means of attack



Security

The major part of attacks in the West in the past fifteen years (85%) was directed at easily approachable or accessible targets with little to no surrounding security measures. A relatively small number of attacks (8%) was directed against targets with some form of access control, for example entry tickets and bag checks. Of all attacks, 12% was directed against targets that were under physical protection by police officers or the military. Only 5% of all attacks in the West was directed against (very) well-protected targets, so-called *hard targets*.⁴

There has been little change to this picture in the past fifteen years, with one exception: during the first ten years there were no attacks against targets under physical protection, whereas in the past five years 16% of all attacks was directed against such

⁴ The sum of these percentages comes to more than 100% because attacks on more than one target could involve various levels of security.

sites. This sharply increased percentage correlates with the sharp increase in the use of surveillance as a security measure in response to increased terrorist threat.

In some cases, the perpetrator of the attack made a conscious decision to attack an unprotected target because the actual (primary) target was protected. In such instances we see that the perpetrator resorts to target substitution. One example is the attack in the inner city of the German town of Ansbach in 2016. The perpetrator of this attack had originally intended to attack a festival, but he did not have a ticket and was therefore unable to enter the festival grounds.

In the past fifteen years we also witnessed a few instances of interest on the part of terrorists to target large-scale events like the Football World Cup and the Olympic Games. These are generally events that are well secured and as such much more difficult targets. In the cases where terrorists had their sights on such events, the security



22 March 2017, Westminster Bridge, London

A man uses a rental car to drive into pedestrians on Westminster Bridge (near the Houses of Parliament) in the British capital of London. When the car has come to a stop against a fence, the perpetrator gets out of the car and runs towards the parliament building, where he stabs a police officer. The perpetrator is subsequently shot and killed by the police. In addition to the perpetrator himself, five people are killed in the attack, and more than fifty are injured.

For a full overview of the attacks that were carried out in the West in the past fifteen years, see the timeline on aivd.nl/aanslagen.

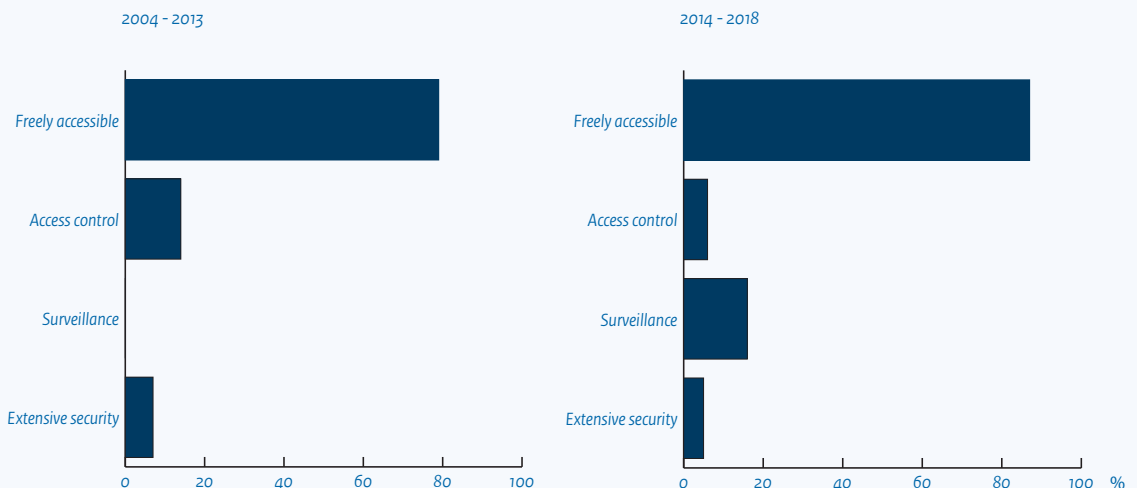
surrounding the event gave reason for abandoning these plans and switching to other, easier targets instead.

In conclusion

In the past fifteen years many Western countries and targets were hit by jihadist terrorist attacks. This publication provides an overview of the most important facts with regard to these attacks. In doing so, the AIVD hopes to contribute to the availability of objective knowledge on jihadist terrorist attacks carried out in the West.

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Graph 8: Security





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