



# DEADLY ATTACKS

**Brian Michael Jenkins and Bruce R Butterworth** examine why it is that developing nations face deadlier terrorism

**T**errorist attacks in developing countries are far more frequent and lethal than those in economically advanced countries such as those in North America and Europe, and many reflect long-standing and often violent conflicts and insurgencies. Some of these attacks have been quite sophisticated, with the most lethal carried out by jihadist groups. These are the key findings of our most recent report,

**Evolving Patterns of Violence in Developing Countries, for the Mineta Transportation Institute (MTI).**

When horrific terrorist attacks occur in economically advanced countries such as those in North America and Europe (which we will be calling Group one for convenience going forward), they are widely reported and have lasting psychological impact. We wanted to find out whether attacks are more frequent and lethal in less economically advanced countries (which we will

**Attacks in Sub-Saharan Africa have been increasing as jihadist terrorist groups have joined with separatist, criminal and tribal groups in the region**

be calling Group two from here on) and examine the differences and similarities of the attacks in terms of location, targets, attackers, attack methods and use of suicide attackers.

Ultimately, we discovered that Group two countries experienced as much as seven times the number of attacks and three times greater lethality compared with Group one countries.

To support the analysis, we used MTI's Database on Terrorism and Serious Criminal Attacks Against Public Surface Transportation to analyse attacks against passenger train and train stations, bus and bus stations and stops, all rail infrastructure and operating and security personnel that occurred between 1 January, 2004 and 31 December, 2022. This involved a total of 3,836 attacks worldwide that resulted in 7412 fatalities and 21,857 injuries for our study.

They included the 2010 train derailment by Maoist insurgents in West Bengal, killing 48 and injuring 800 and the 2014 car bomb by jihadists at a bus station in Nigeria, killing 71 and injuring 24.

## LETHAL ATTACK

The most lethal attack was the July 2006 jihadist bombings on commuter trains leaving Mumbai, killing 189 and injuring at least 800. The terrorist group, Lashkar-e-Taiba, a Pakistan-based Islamic organisation that can be considered jihadist, placed seven bombs in pressure cookers and detonated them within 15 minutes of each other during Mumbai's evening rush hour, targeting first-class cabins in trains leaving the city's financial district. The first bomb detonated at 6:24pm, the last at 6:35pm. More than nine years later, following a long and controversial investigation, 12 people were convicted of the attack; five were sentenced to death, and five were sentenced to life in prison.

We realised that Group two countries are shown to have a higher level of violence, not simply because of a greater number of attacks (which is to be expected, since these countries contain a larger portion of the global population), but because the quality of the violence is different. There are more attacks that are part of long-running insurgencies, guerrilla wars and terrorist campaigns; these attacks are particularly bloody. Tactical repertoires and target preferences have become more normalised, with some of the attackers benefitting from external state training.

## BUS ATTACKS

There are also far more attacks on buses and bus depots and stops in Group two, reflecting greater reliance on bus travel. Explosives dominate attack methods, and while jihadist attackers are responsible for only 9.7 percent of attacks, they cause 33.7 percent of the fatalities. In fact, jihadists are the most lethal attackers in both Group one and Group two countries. Suicide attacks account for only about 3 percent of the attacks in both groups, but while that percentage has gone down in Group one, it has increased in Group two.

India, Pakistan and Iraq account for half of the attacks in Group two countries. Along with Bangladesh, the Philippines, Thailand, Colombia, Nigeria, the Russian Federation and Nepal, they accounted for 75

percent of attacks although levels of violence in India and Pakistan have declined slightly in recent years.

The statistics also indicate that outside of the most intense conflict areas, most of the

Group two countries experience levels of violence that are comparable to that in Group one countries.

Over time, attacks in South Asia, South-East Asia, and the Middle East and North Africa have been decreasing after a peak in 2014–2015. In direct contrast, attacks in Sub-Saharan Africa have been increasing as jihadist terrorist groups have joined with separatist, criminal, and tribal groups in the region. In the past two years, there have been several bloody attacks in the region, including massacres of passengers on buses.

Clear trends in fatal attacks are harder to discern for all regions, but the frequency and lethality in the regions is generally clear. There have been few major changes in the pattern of violence within the Group two countries. The diversity of the countries

## SUICIDE ATTACKS ACCOUNT FOR THE SAME PERCENT IN GROUP TWO COUNTRIES AS GROUP ONE

and sheer volume of violence in them may dilute dramatic changes. The levels of violence in India and Pakistan have decreased slightly in recent years, while the violence in Sub-Saharan Africa has increased, owing to the activities of jihadist groups in the Sahel. The levels in Thailand have also increased due to separatist activity in the Southern part of the country. Iraq saw a sharp escalation in violence following the US-led invasion in 2003.

We saw that while the overall volume of attacks in Group two countries decreased slightly between the 17 years between 2004 and 2021, the lethality of the attacks also decreased.

The most dominant attack method in Group two countries is the use of explosives which account for more than half (55.7 percent) of the attacks and 60.2 percent of the fatalities. By contrast, the use of explosives has decreased in Group one countries. Firearms were used in a fifth (20.7 percent) of all attacks. Attacks with these two methods were also the most lethal in Group two countries. Other lethal methods included stabbings, massacres and murders of individuals, along with a single vehicle ramming.

While attackers motivated by jihadist ideology are responsible for less than 10 percent of attacks, they were the most lethal, as these involved combinations of explosives targeting bus stations and bus stops, and armed assaults on buses. A total of 1,278 attacks using explosives occurred on buses and bus stations or stops and passenger trains and train stations, resulting in the high number of casualties. Reflecting the dominance of train over bus transportation in the developed world, the most lethal combinations in attacks in Group one countries were also those carried out by jihadists, but attacking passenger train targets rather than buses with explosives.

Naxalite (Maoist) insurgents in India, and miscellaneous groups, such as Syrian rebels and pro-

Russian separatists in Ukraine before the 2022 Russian invasion also favoured the use of explosives followed by automatic weapons, fire and arson, and one derailment. Jihadists were clearly the most lethal attackers.

However, the largest category of attackers involves unknown perpetrators or anarchist/environmental groups and individuals attacking rail infrastructure

## THE MOST DOMINANT ATTACK METHOD IN GROUP TWO COUNTRIES IS THE USE OF EXPLOSIVES

with mechanical sabotage or arson and improvised incendiary devices (IIDs). These accounted for as much as 45.8 percent of the attacks and 33.5 percent of the fatalities.

We saw that the number of execution-style murders has grown steadily, particularly since 2015. Most of these attacks have taken place in South Asia (India and Pakistan) and Sub-Saharan Africa (Nigeria and Somalia).

Suicide attacks, which receive a lot of attention and generate much fear, actually account for only about 3 percent of the attacks in Group two countries, the same percentage as in Group one. But while the percentage of suicide attacks has declined in Group one, it has gone up slightly in Group two.

Another interesting comparison between Group one and Group two countries can be found by looking at the most lethal combinations of attacker and attack method – those whose lethality (deaths per attack) are greater than the overall average.

In Group two, there are 15 such combinations.

They account for 1,481 attacks (44.1 percent) of all attacks, and 5,921 (83.9 percent) of all fatalities. But the combined lethality of this set was 4.0 fatalities per attack, which is only 1.9 times more than the overall average of 2.1.

In Group two countries, there is much less difference between the 'average' and the 'most lethal attacks' than there is in Group one. In Group one, there are eight combinations that had a lethality higher than the overall average. These eight combinations account for only 57 (12 percent) of the 476 attacks but 285 (81 percent) of the 352 fatalities – the high fatality events are statistical outliers. The lethality of these seven combinations combined – because of the March 2004 Madrid bombing, the July 2005 London bombing and the 2016 Brussels bombings, all of which were jihadist explosive attacks against passenger train or train station targets – is five deaths per attack, which is over seven times more lethal than the average lethality of all Group one attacks, which is less than one death (0.7) per attack.

In simpler terms, attacks causing high casualties are more frequent in Group two countries. However, by analysing and comparing what has been going on in advanced and non-economically advanced countries, governments and transportation professionals will be able to use the data to help understand the overall picture and rethink their current security and staff training strategies.

Our report is intended as a companion report to the August 2022 MTI report on violence in economically advanced countries, *Changing Patterns of Violence Pose New Challenges to Public Surface Transportation in the United States*. Once again, due to their unique circumstances, Israel and the Palestinian territories will be analysed in a separate report ●

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