



Comparing Failed, Foiled, Completed and Successful Terrorist Attacks: Year 5 Final Report

*Report to the Office of University Programs,
Science and Technology Directorate,
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About This Report

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About START

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Executive Summary

This report provides an overview of the analytical framework applied by the research and the key findings from data about the targets, methods, perpetrators, and plot outcomes relating to failed, foiled, and successful jihadi attacks against the United States and a set of allied countries. During the fifth and final year of the research, we have finalized the data set relating to 121 jihadist terrorist plots against the U.S. homeland between 1993 and 2017, along with 314 plots against New Zealand, Australia and countries that are members of the European Union and NATO. An inter-rater reliability analysis of the U.S. data has been conducted, with the coding scheme being found to be highly reliable. We have complete data on how each plot was foiled (or failed) and how the method of disruption or intervention varies at each stage of the unfolding operation.

The number of attempted and successful plots has increased in recent years, both in the United States and in the other countries studied. Analysis of the U.S. data set has revealed that the majority of unsuccessful plots are foiled by some type of outside intervention (as compared to failed for internal reasons). Recorded failed attacks are rare in both the U.S. and non-U.S. data, although it is acknowledged that many failures may never reach the stage where they would be identified. While we also acknowledge that we might not be picking up as much information on foiled plots abroad, foiled plots outnumber successful ones in most non-U.S. countries, with countries such as the United Kingdom, France and Germany being the most frequently targeted.

Most of the foiled U.S. plots involve surveillance and/or government informants who enter the plot at an early stage, although the public have also played an important role in disruption of plots primarily by identifying suspicious activity. Government surveillance is also the most frequent means of disruption in the non-U.S. plots, although the role of informants (or the reporting of their role) is much smaller overseas. While a high proportion of the foiled U.S. plots involved “stings”, where would-be perpetrators attempted to follow through their plans with inert weapons, these operations are rarely seen outside the United States.

Almost half of the U.S. plots were carried out with or planned to involve explosives and almost a third of all plots were armed assaults. Comparing foiled and successful attacks in the United States showed more foiled bombings and more successful armed assaults. Military personnel and the police accounted for almost a third of actual or intended U.S. targets, but the majority of plots were directed at private citizens, whether in public spaces, using public transport or at businesses such as restaurants and bars. In the United States, the targets that are aspired to are very similar to those actually hit, with the exception of attacks planned against transport, none of which were coded as successful. During the period 2010-2016 non-U.S. perpetrators attacked or planned to attack more private citizen targets than the U.S. perpetrators who aimed for more military targets. The proportion of attacks that were planned to be bombings, armed assaults, etc., during this time period were very similar for the U.S. and the non-U.S. samples, showing terrorist weapon and attack type choices to be comparable regardless of location.

Most U.S. perpetrators are young men who are American citizens or residents, and only three returned foreign fighters are among them. Most (but not all) are Muslims from diverse immigrant backgrounds, but there is a significant proportion of converts, which does not seem to be paralleled in the non-U.S. sample. The majority are not formally associated with a known extremist organization, although we note credible links between perpetrators and organizations as well as a small number of claims of responsibility by known groups. We find that true “lone wolves” are actually quite rare, with only 17 perpetrators fitting a strict definition; however, their attacks are more likely to be successful.

The non-U.S. perpetrators include more returned foreign fighters than in the United States, and while more cases have credible links to terrorist organizations, claims of responsibility are no more frequent. The Islamic State both over and under claims, claiming responsibility for attacks to which there was no evidence of a link and not claiming some where there was a credible link. Non-U.S. plots have a higher mean number of perpetrators than in the United States. However, for the U.S. cases, excluding 9/11 from the analysis revealed that there was no statistically significant difference between the mean number of team members involved in successful attacks as compared to those that were unsuccessful. Thus, there does not appear to be a relationship between the size of the group plotting an attack and the likelihood of the attack being successful.

Introduction

The Need for a New Database

The current research provides a new database recording failed and foiled jihadist plots against the United States and selected overseas allies occurring between 1993 and 2017. The data are thus extensive in terms of time period covered and countries included. This report outlines some of the key findings, focusing on trends and case studies from the data collected. First, the attacks against the U.S. homeland are considered, both in terms of the nature of all attempts and in terms of the difference between those attacks that succeed and those that do not. Since the failed and foiled plots project also collected data on countries that are members of the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization as well as Australia and New Zealand, the second section of the report provides some international comparison of the threats emerging in recent years. This section takes the data from 2010, when there was a steep increase in threats to the United States, through 2016, the last complete year of data collection, to provide a general picture of the threat to the West and permit comparison between the United States and other western democracies. The analysis draws on work completed in the early years of the project with the development of a detailed coding framework and a test of the reliability of the coding scheme.

It is certainly the case that in the United States there are more jihadist plots that are successfully disrupted than terrorist attacks that can be said to have achieved some kinetic effect.¹ How plots come to fail or to be foiled is therefore of great importance to the study of terrorism and to the development of counter-terrorism policy. There can be no comprehensive picture of the threat without analyzing what violent jihadist adversaries planned to do as well as what they actually managed to accomplish. Examining failed and foiled plots is essential to understanding their intentions as well as their capabilities. Nor can the validity of public concern be judged without an evaluation of what extreme jihadists aspired to do. A balanced view of plots, successful and unsuccessful, is essential to public appreciation of the threat. The current data therefore allow an insight into the aspirations of those who target the United States and allied countries as well as an understanding of how plots came to fail or were successfully disrupted.

Despite the importance of understanding unsuccessful plots, academic research and appraisal has often excluded them from analysis. For example, the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) does not include plots that have not developed to the point where a specific action toward carrying them out has taken place. Thus, for example, the GTD includes cases where suicide bombers actually don vests and undertake suicide missions but excludes cases where perpetrators building suicide vests blow themselves up by accident. However, researchers are beginning to collect data on terrorism that includes plots at earlier stages. For example, Thomas Hegghammer and Petter Nesser developed databases on jihadi plots in the West.² Erik

¹ See our definition of “success” below.

² See Thomas Hegghammer and Petter Nesser, “Assessing the Islamic State’s Commitment to Attacking the West,” *Perspectives on Terrorism*, vol. 9 (2015) (www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/440/html). Their dataset covers January 2011 through June 2015, and the dataset is compatible with Hegghammer’s “Jihadi Plots in the West” dataset, covering 1990-2010, Thomas Hegghammer, “Should I Stay or Should I Go? Explaining Variation in Western Jihadists’ Choice between Domestic and Foreign Fighting,” *American Political Science Review*, vol. 107 (2013). See also 1995-2012 data analyzed in Petter Nesser, *Islamist Terrorism in Europe* (Oxford University Press, 2016).

Dahl's work included plots as well as attacks on U.S. targets inside and outside of the homeland by jihadists as well as non-jihadists.³ Finally, research by Jeff Gruenewald and his colleagues presented comparisons between U.S. plots and completed attacks.⁴

Data Sources

Our approach is not identical to any of the other recent efforts to collect data on terrorist plots but rather complements them and adds additional variables and details as well as scope. The current database has been constructed from public sources on successful, as well as failed and foiled, jihadist attempts to use violence against the homelands of the United States and its Western allies since the first bombing of the World Trade Center in 1993. These sources include not only news outlets but also government documents including Department of Justice and FBI statements. For U.K. cases, Crown Prosecution documents were also consulted. It is acknowledged that any data derived from public sources may omit information known only to intelligence agencies; however, such are the constraints for research in the public domain. This problem is especially apparent in the non-U.S. data, since although international news outlets have always been consulted, we are mainly only able to code from English language accounts (although some French language sources have also been used). It is certainly the case that actual attacks will be over represented in comparison to unsuccessful plots, which do not receive as much media coverage. Thus, if anything, our account underestimates rather than overestimates the number of plots as opposed to completed attacks, and is biased toward the methods of terrorist attack and authority counter response that are reported in cases that are already progressing through the criminal justice system at the time of completion of data collection. Whether the perpetrators *really* intended to go through with an attack and exactly how the security services *really* disrupted it may be information that can never be acquired in this kind of research; however, we compile publically available information in as much detail as possible.

Inclusion Criteria

What constitutes a plot? The primary unit of analysis is the plot itself, which is taken to mean a plan or scheme to commit violent action. Usually targets and methods are specified in the plan, although these may be general categories. It is not necessary for would-be perpetrators to have acquired weapons for a plot to exist. When a plot is in the earlier stages, it can be difficult to decide whether it should be included or not. We determine that in order to constitute a plot there must first be evidence of intention to act; that is, a conception of ends and means, of steps to be taken by the perpetrator(s) to carry out an act of violence motivated as described below. However, in addition to intention, there needs to be evidence of further steps taken, for example:

- a) attempting to (or actually) acquiring weapons,
- b) scouting or other reconnaissance of targets,
- c) attempting to recruit others to take part the plot alongside themselves,

³ Erik Dahl, *Intelligence and Surprise Attack: Failure and Success from Pearl Harbor to 9/11 and Beyond* (Georgetown University Press, 2013).

⁴ Jeff Gruenewald, Joshua D. Freilich, Steven M. Chermak, and William S. Parkin, "Research Highlight: Violence Perpetrated by Supporters of al-Qa'ida and Affiliated Movements (AQAM): Fatal Attacks and Violent Plots in the United States," START Research Brief to the Resilient Systems Division, Science and Technology Directorate, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2014.

- d) training specifically for that purpose, or
- e) seeking advice about concrete actions from an organization or other militants.

In this way, offering to take violent action for a cause, making threats, or inciting others to action does not count as a plot; the perpetrators must intend to take action themselves. We do not therefore include threats, when they occur alone, such as to assassinate the president, whether sent directly to an official body, or issued publically on social media. We do not include incitement to violence, such as the naming of potential targets on social media.

Attempting to travel or actually traveling overseas to fight or train in local conflicts is not enough to qualify as an additional step, nor is joining an officially designated Foreign Terrorist Organization, funding terrorist activities or contributing to terrorist propaganda. These activities may of course coincide with plans to use violence, but they are not necessarily or always linked. Thus, we do not simply include all individuals accused of links to extremism but look also at the details of charges and convictions as well as what actions were actually planned. We do not include the acquisition of weapons alone, in the absence of any evidence of their intended use, as these may be for criminal purposes.

Convictions. Most American perpetrators have been convicted in a court of law of the actions in question; where one or more perpetrators have been charged and convicted over a plot, this is taken as sufficient evidence. If perpetrators are charged or indicted but subsequently not convicted, they are not included in the dataset. If the defendants in a plot go to trial and all are acquitted, then that plot can no longer be said to have been a plot and it is not included. The actual charges and convictions relating to the plots are very diverse and may well in some instances reflect plea deals. There are a number of perpetrators in the data set who have been charged but are still awaiting trial, and some who died or were killed at the scene of attacks that were carried through. Where a perpetrator has pleaded not guilty and is still awaiting trial, the case has been included if the charges are detailed and plausible, but if they are subsequently acquitted the case can be deleted in the future. In some U.S. cases, authorities in foreign countries apprehended the perpetrators (e.g., the 2006 London liquid explosives plot).

Plot progress: In recent years there are a number of potential cases that came to our attention, but the investigation or prosecution of the cases had not progressed far enough to warrant their inclusion at this stage. These cases have been kept on file so that they can be included should the data be updated at a later stage.

One plot or many? Plots often have multiple component parts, as the 9/11 attacks and the 2015 Paris assaults did. A plot can involve one attack group of perpetrators acting in coordination or an individual acting alone, although multiple targets and methods may be involved in any given plot.⁵ Deciding whether

⁵ Our approach is thus unlike that used in Gruenewald's 2014 START report, which counts each target and location as a separate plot. We argue that a plot can have multiple targets possibly in multiple locations that are part of the same plan of attack. As a partial consequence the 2014 START Report contains over twice as many "plots" in its dataset. See also below, note 5, in terms of our inclusion requirements.

to define sequences of events or intended events as one plot or as several independent plots takes into account time intervals between intended or actual attacks, geographical location of the targets, and the apparent intent of the perpetrators. Thus, a continuous sequence of events by the same perpetrator or perpetrators, even when using different methods and aimed at separate targets would count as one plot, for example, a bomb attack against one target, followed by a shooting in a another location on the same day. If the same perpetrator conducts a series of attacks, but on different days in different towns, each attack would be counted as a separate plot. If the attack is continuous but runs over midnight, this will still be the same plot. A series of letter bombs are taken to be the same case even if the letters arrived at different times, but only if they are part of the same perpetrators' campaign. Knowledge of the details of the plan is thus essential, although sometimes hard to glean from public sources. For attacks that were merely planned and never attempted (whether failed or foiled) it is almost impossible to ascertain whether different components were planned to occur on the same day or not, and therefore all of the components are coded as part of the same plot.

Locations. For the U.S. dataset, plots are restricted to concrete plans to use violence in or against the U.S. homeland, including attempted bombings of airliners flying to the United States. For the non-U.S. plots, the intention can be to act in any NATO or EU country (with the addition of Australia and New Zealand) regardless of whether the perpetrator or perpetrators currently reside there. Plots against airliners are coded if their point of departure *or* intended destination is within the designated countries. For the U.S. data set, where an attack is part of plots against other countries as well, only the U.S. element of the attack is coded. Where applicable, the other international attacks will be included in the non-U.S. data set. Note that although U.S. and allied targets are frequently victims of terrorist attack in other countries, if the actual location of the attack is not within the locations specified here they are beyond the scope of the current research. This will also mean that although many American and other Westerners are still taken hostage, this tends to occur in countries outside the EU/NATO countries specified here.

What is the motivation? By acting in the name of "jihadist" causes we mean that there is evidence that the perpetrators or would-be perpetrators intended their actions to serve the ends of violent strains of jihadi Islamism.⁶ Obtaining conclusive evidence of individual motivation is notoriously difficult, especially since the perpetrators themselves may not know why they acted, or may have been killed at the scene. We relied on public statements made by perpetrators (e.g., videotaped statements distributed by the groups that claim them or Facebook postings), intercepted communications among perpetrators (used by government authorities in court, for example), witness reports of statements made before or during an attack or attempt, or perpetrators' trial testimony explaining motivation.

Mental illness: One area where is it difficult to judge whether a plot should be included or not is when the perpetrator suffers from mental illness. If we take the definition of terrorism as relating to the act not the

⁶ We are more restrictive in our requirement that the perpetrators intend to commit acts of violence in the service of jihadist causes than the 2014 START report. For example, we do not include the 2002 belt way sniper shootings by John Allen Muhammed and Lee Boyd Malvo, which the START report lists as 15 independent plots.

actor, as many scholars do,⁷ then the mental health status of the actor should not preclude the act from being included in the data set. However, there are a number of cases, in the U.S as well as in the non-U.S. data, where the perpetrator's mental illness appears to be the over-riding factor in the attack, and indeed some cases have explicitly been defined as "not terrorism" by the countries involved in the prosecution. For this reason, some judgments had to be made about whether the illness was the *primary factor* that led to their actions, as compared to some offenders who had illness in their personal histories, but were considered to still be culpable for the offence and were deemed fit to stand trial.

Who are the perpetrators? We consider as perpetrators those individuals who take an active role in the plot, including making plans, acquiring and deploying weapons, conducting surveillance, or providing funds with direct knowledge of their intended purpose. The key consideration is that the members of a group are involved in the same plan of action and are in communication with each other as the plan develops. Complicating matters, the same perpetrator or group of perpetrators can be responsible for several independent plots or a single plot with multiple interdependent components. There may be many or few perpetrators, including so-called "lone wolves." We identify the perpetrators by name, residence (for U.S. cases, city and state where available), citizenship, and country of origin if not identical to the country of citizenship. We also note whether the perpetrators are Muslim, and if Muslim whether converts to Islam or Muslim from birth.

Reasonable assumptions. It should be noted that, whilst a person being a convert (or a non-Muslim) is often mentioned in news or other reports, it is rarely mentioned when a person is Muslim from birth. In these instances, there are reasonable assumptions that can be made. For example, if a person is talked about in relation to the Muslim community, or a mosque they have attended, or it is stated that they are from a mainly Muslim country, one might reasonably expect that they are indeed Muslims in the absence of information otherwise. Where there is no reasonable evidence, the case is coded missing on this field, to indicate that we do not know the perpetrator's religion. Reasonable evidence is also used in relation to whether the perpetrator had returned from fighting or training in a conflict abroad. This refers to the concern about "foreign fighters" who leave their countries of residence to fight in foreign conflicts and return to commit acts of violence at home. Here again, a person having engaged in foreign fighting abroad is often mentioned in news and other reports, but it is rarely stated that they *have not*. In these instances, there are reasonable assumptions that can be made. For example, if a person is noted to have tried and failed to reach a foreign country to fight, one might reasonably expect that they have not fought or trained abroad. Likewise teenage school children who are citizens of western countries might also be assumed not to have fought or trained abroad unless otherwise stated. Where there is no reasonable evidence, we indicate that we do not know whether the perpetrators fought or trained abroad, by entering a missing code.

⁷ See for example Schmid, A. P., (1993) Defining terrorism: The response problem as a definition problem. In A. P. Schmid and R. D. Crelinsten (Eds.) *Western Responses to Terrorism*. London: Frank Cass.

Plot Outcomes

Each of the plots is coded as to whether it was completed, successful, failed, or foiled. These variables are independent of one another and therefore a single plot can be coded with any combination of these variables. It is therefore possible for elements of the same plot to be both failed and foiled. For example, we would classify shoe bomber Richard Reid in 2001 and underwear bomber Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab in 2009 as both failed and foiled, as their destructive efforts were blocked at the last minute by fellow airline passengers, and it is not entirely certain that the devices would have actually detonated. Success can also be combined with elements of failed or foiled, since a plot that has multiple components may succeed in some aspects of its implementation but not in others. For example, in June 2009 Abdulhakim Mujahid Muhammad set out to kill a rabbi in Nashville as well as to shoot military staff at a recruitment center. The attack against the rabbi's house failed, not only because the rabbi no longer lived at that address but also because the Molotov cocktails failed to ignite. However, Muhammad went on to shoot two soldiers outside a military recruiting center in Arkansas, an aspect of his plan which was both completed and successful. However, completion of the plot does not necessarily signify success. Some plots were physically completed but did not necessarily result in tangible and visible effects – for example, a would-be perpetrator placed a bomb at his chosen target, but it failed to explode (e.g., the 2010 Times Square attempt).

Completed: As indicated above, the completion of a plot is determined independently of its eventual success. In this way, the plot is coded as completed if the actions intended by the perpetrator were carried out to their final stage of implementation, whether or not they had their intended physical impact. For example, a bomb that is successfully planted in its intended location would be coded as a completed plot, regardless of whether the bomb then went on to detonate. Plots with multiple components are coded completed if any one aspect of the planned attack reached its intended conclusion, again, regardless of the scale of damage or resultant loss of life. The numbers of deaths and injuries caused by each attack are coded in separate variables.

Successful: We do not judge success in terms of whether the perpetrators attained their objectives in a larger political sense and could thus be considered effective in using terrorism – something that is very difficult to know and has provoked much debate among academics.⁸ Even a foiled plot such as the 2009 Christmas bombing attempt can have dramatic public impact and constitute a significant success from the terrorists' point of view despite the immediate outcome. Likewise, a plot might have been intended to kill hundreds of people but (fortunately) killed many fewer, thus constituting a failure in the eyes of the perpetrators, but we count this as a success in the sense we are using here. Thus, we follow the GTD definition of "success" as the logistical success of the plot in terms of achieving the kinetic action that was planned, regardless of the outcome in number of deaths, the response to the attack or the long-term consequences. Since the planned attacks in the database come in many different forms it is necessary to

⁸ Max Abrahms, "The Political Effectiveness of Terrorism Revisited," *Comparative Political Studies* vol. 45 (2012), pp. 366-93; Peter Krause, "The Structure of Success: How the Internal Distribution of Power Drives Armed Group Behavior and National Movement Effectiveness," *International Security*, vol. 38 (Winter 2013/2014), pp. 72-116; Peter Krause, "The Political Effectiveness of Non-State Violence: A Two-Level Framework to Transform a Deceptive Debate," *Security Studies*, vol. 22 (Summer 2013), pp. 259-294; and Richard English, *Does Terrorism Work? A History* (Oxford University Press, 2016).

define success in different terms for each mode of attack, and here again we drew on GTD definitions. For example, the success of a bomb attack lies in the explosives detonating, while the success of an assassination must be measured in terms of whether the target has been killed. Each definition has been carefully constructed for the coding dictionary and has been tested to ensure reliability between independent coders.

Failed: These are plots that failed because of something the would-be perpetrators did, a factor internal to the plot – either they made a mechanical mistake or they had a change of intention.⁹ Constructing an explosive device, for example, is technically difficult and the procedure can go wrong, as it fortunately did in Faisal Shahzad’s failed Times Square car bombing attempt in 2010. Shoe bomber Richard Reid’s accomplice Saajid Badat did not follow through with the plan to bring down trans-Atlantic airliners in December 2001, because he changed his mind. There are almost certainly many more failed plots than publicly available information indicates, so we must certainly be undercounting these cases. It is very likely that many plots are abandoned by the perpetrators before they come to others’ attention, and these we will never know about. For those plots that we *do* know about, we code not only that they failed but the type of failure, whether it was because of some practical failure of the plan (such as technological) or whether it was because of human failures (such a change of heart or loss of nerve).

Foiled: Plots that were foiled were unsuccessful because of some kind of intervention, whether from members of the public, friends or family, or by government authorities; in the United States this is usually FBI or local or state law enforcement, sometimes with the assistance of the intelligence agencies of foreign governments.¹⁰ Here again, when a plot was deemed to have been foiled it is recorded how the plot was foiled, whether by the authorities or the public, and in more detail such as whether surveillance or informants played a role, or whether the plot was foiled by intervention in the field, or a tip off from members of the community. We also record whether the government that directly interrupted the plot had assistance from a foreign government.

Stage of Detection/Intervention

In order to understand more about unsuccessful plots we defined a number of stages in a plot’s development and coded at which stage the plot failed. Where a plot was foiled, we recorded the stage at which it was a) discovered or identified and b) interrupted or terminated. The reason that the detection and the intervention were coded separately was because there were a number of cases where early detection of the plan was followed by controlled monitoring, sometimes with undercover officers in place, until the plot reached a stage at which enough evidence had been collected to ensure a conviction.

While initially we envisaged temporal consecutive stages of a plot’s planning, it soon became clear that plots develop in different orders. For example, while some might acquire weapons first and choose a target later, others start by picking a target and leave weapons capability until later. The stages of plot

⁹ Again, this definition differentiates our study from the 2014 START Report, which includes as “failed” those plots stopped by law enforcement action during their final stages.

¹⁰ The START Report includes “perpetrator desistance” prior to the final stages of the plan as plot foiling. We would consider this a failed plot rather than foiled.

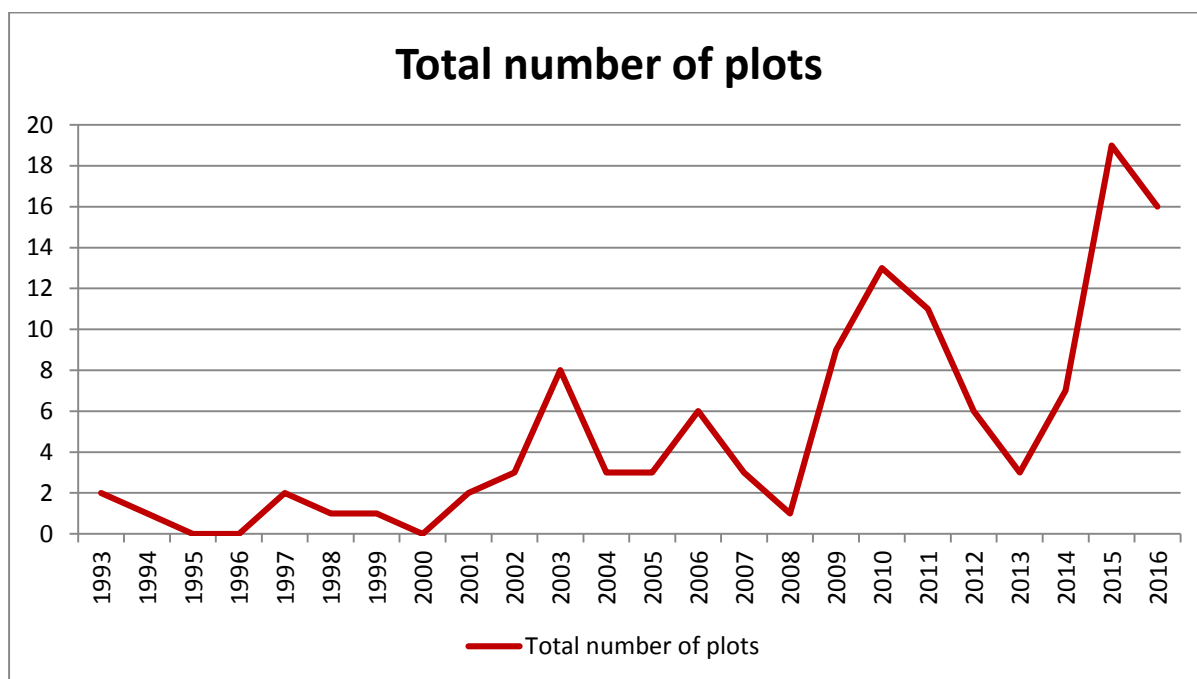
development, without assuming any particular order, were therefore considered to be: (1) communication of intent, e.g., by telling someone face-to-face, posting messages on Facebook or other website, or emailing someone (sometimes involving searching for useful information on the Internet); (2) attempt to acquire capability, e.g., by purchasing or stealing weapons or the materials necessary to build a bomb, engaging in exploratory travel, conducting target reconnaissance or recruiting accomplices; (3) practice or training specifically for an attack (preparation that might take place abroad), such as training in the use of weapons or explosives; (4) elaboration of an actual plan with detailed target and method selection; (5) final physical implementation stage (such as travel to the target with the weapon). Plots can fail at any of these stages. They can also be detected or disrupted at any of these stages as well.

Results: The U.S. Cases

Frequency over Time

Since February 1993, the date of the first bombing of the World Trade Center, through February 2017, our research identifies 121¹¹ jihadist-linked plots to use violence against the American homeland, a few of which were physically accomplished but the majority of which were not.¹² Figure 1 shows the frequency of plots by year over the time period sampled. Here we have not included the data for 2017, as the year does not have complete data. There is an increase in planned or actual attacks following 9/11, but a steep increase after 2010, with even more cases identified in recent years.

Figure 1: The frequency of successful and unsuccessful plots by year (February 1993-December 2016).



¹¹ Please note that not all analyses contain all 121 cases owing to missing data.

¹² Martha Crenshaw, Erik Dahl, and Margaret Wilson: Failed and Foiled Plots Dataset (FFP).

Targets

Not all of the plots were clear about the exact location where the targets of the terrorist acts were to take place, and in some instances more than one target was planned in more than one state, which may bias the findings slightly where one perpetrator may have multiple chosen targets in one state. Therefore, the results of the analysis can only give a general guide to the most frequently chosen locations for these actual or planned terrorist attacks.

Eleven target locations were unknown or unstated, and 10 targets were aviation. The remaining targets include multiple target locations in the same plot, and taking all 119 known planned or actual target locations, the intended or actual targets are not spread evenly over the 50 states. Almost a quarter of all plots were meant to occur or did occur in the state of New York (if we add New Jersey to the metropolitan region the number increases to almost 30%). Targets in the District of Columbia (n=10) and Virginia (n=10) account for 16.8 percent of the sample. Next in order of attractiveness as targeted locations are the states of Florida (n=8), California (n=7), Texas (n=7), and Illinois (n=5), although the frequencies are small. Twenty-four states had no recorded targets, whether actual or intended. For the U.S. data, the location of the targets is very similar to the location of perpetrator residence, as where a perpetrator had a known U.S. residence, the greatest number of perpetrators were from the New York-New Jersey area, with Florida and California next.

In some instances more than one target was planned in the same plot, which may bias the findings slightly if, for example, one perpetrator has a preference for military targets and chose three in the same plot. However, there were no coded cases in the U.S. data where more than three targets were selected. In total, there are 163 targets identifiable by type across the 121 U.S. attacks or planned attacks. The targets were coded according to a number of categories, and the most frequently chosen targets were military, accounting for just over a fifth of the sample (21.5%). In the accounts of the incidents or planned attacks, it is certainly evident that some perpetrators saw military targets as “legitimate”, and this may also account for the 9.8 percent of the attacks that were directed at police officers. These results are generally similar to recent findings on failed and foiled plots by Jeff Gruenewald and his colleagues.¹³

However, the second most frequent target is “private citizens & property”, which covers individuals, the public in general, or attacks in public areas including markets, commercial streets, busy intersections and pedestrian malls. These targets made up 17.8 percent of the sample. However, another 8.6 percent of the targets were categorized as “Business,” which also includes attacks on restaurants, cafes or movie theaters, and are therefore places frequented by the general public. The same is true of the 8.6 percent of attacks aimed at airports and airliners, and the 9.2 percent of attacks aimed at other forms of transport. There therefore seems to be two rather different approaches to target selection. However, further research is needed to determine which kinds of perpetrator targeted which sector. The other more frequent category of target chosen is “government”(9.2%), which includes government buildings, government members, as well as judges, public attorneys (e.g., prosecutors), courts and court systems, or intelligence agencies and

¹³ Gruenewald, et al., 2014.

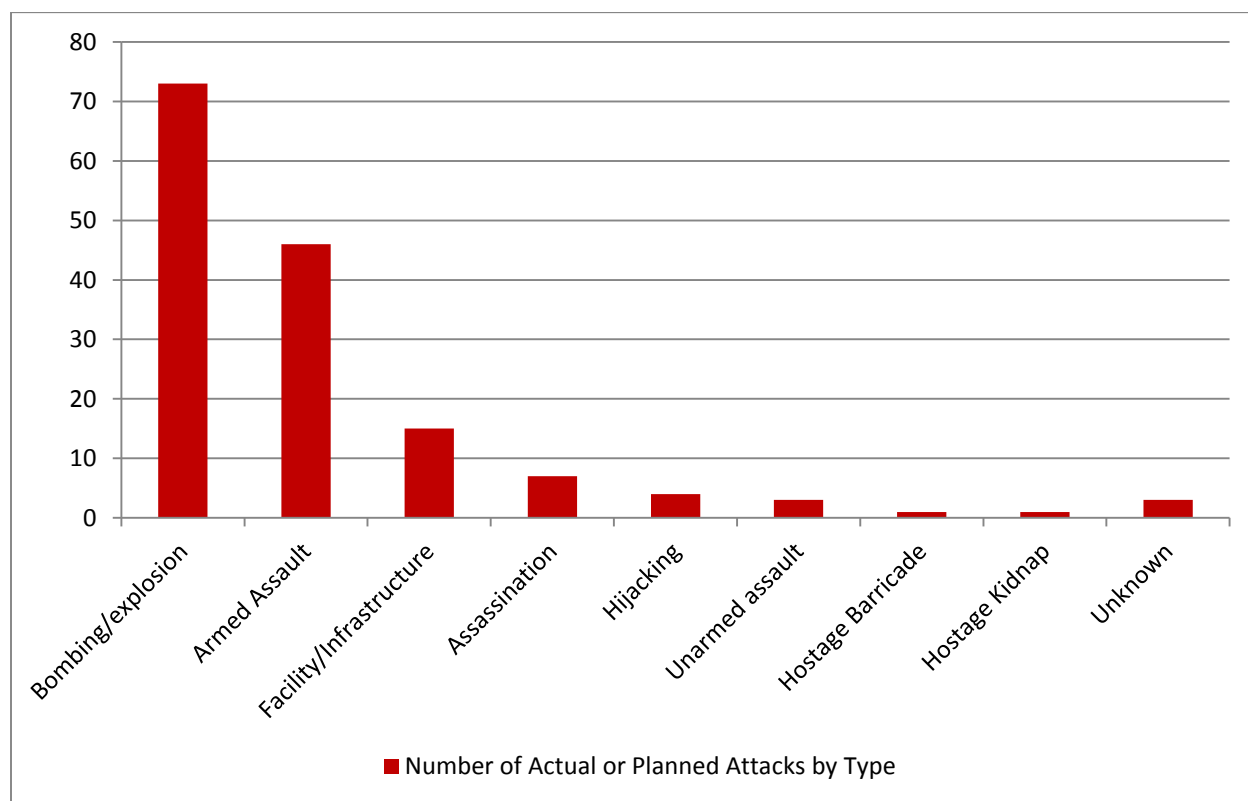
(www.start.umd.edu/pubs/START_ECDB_ViolencePerpetratedbySupportersofAQAM_ResearchHighlight_June2014.pdf).

spies. These targets may fall somewhere between hard targets such as the military and soft targets such as civilians, and may certainly be chosen because of their symbolic value. It is perhaps surprising that only 4.9 percent of the targets were religious and 3.1 percent were aimed at schools and other educational establishments, although this may be because of the backlash that often accompanies attacks of this nature.¹⁴

Mode of Attack

As with the multiple locations found in some plots, a plot might also involve more than one form of attack, for example, a bombing and an armed assault. Therefore, the frequencies shown in Figure 2 account for more attack types than plots in the database.

Figure 2: The type of attack planned or undertaken.



The majority of attacks and plots involve bombings (47.7%), with armed assaults next most common, representing 30.1 percent of the total. Worldwide and over time, terrorists show a strong predilection for bombings,¹⁵ and the data here, which include planned attacks, show this preference is also seen in the aspirations of U.S. attackers. It could be suggested that this bias may be introduced because of the large number of plots in the U.S. data that involve informants who acquire the explosives for the perpetrators. Alternatively, bombings may still be the preferred method of attack among those in our sample.

¹⁴ See Bradford, E., and Wilson M.A., (2013) "When Terrorists Target Schools: An exploratory analysis of attacks on educational institutions," *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology. Terrorism Psychology: Theory and Application*, vol. 28, pp. 127-138.

¹⁵ See LaFree, Dugan, and Miller, *Putting Terrorism in Context: Lessons from the Global Terrorism Database*, p 119.

The 9/11 attacks accounted for the vast majority of fatalities and injuries associated with jihadist terrorism in the United States since 1993. Leaving aside this exceptional case, our figures show 110 deaths (13 of them perpetrators) and 1,452 injuries (five of them perpetrators) in a total of 19 plots, excluding those where the perpetrator was the sole casualty. The first bombing of the World Trade Center accounted for the majority, about 1,000, of those injuries, as well as six fatalities, and the Boston Marathon bombings caused 264 injuries in addition to three fatalities.

Perpetrators

Attack Team Size: With the dramatic exception of the 9/11 attacks, most plots against the U.S. homeland do not involve large numbers of conspirators. Where we know the number of conspirators, two thirds of the attacks or planned attacks (66.7%) involved only one person, and a further 16.7 percent involved only two people. Note as well that only two people, a married couple, were involved in the attacks in San Bernardino in December 2015, and two, brothers, carried out the Boston Marathon bombings, demonstrating that a plot does not have to engage a large number of perpetrators to be deadly. Analysis of the data from 2010 to 2016 comparing the U.S. data with attacks occurring elsewhere in the world shows that the U.S. attacks and plots tended to have smaller team sizes (see the final section on comparison of and U.S. and non-U.S. data).

Lone Wolves: In order to identify the “lone wolves” in the data set we first selected those cases where there was a single perpetrator. However, this alone is not sufficient, as there are cases with credible links to a terrorist organization, and the perpetrator may have been being directed by overseas operatives. These cases were not counted. We also ruled out those cases where the perpetrators *thought* that they were part of a team of actors, on the basis of being caught up in a sting operation, or were working alongside undercover officers. Many of the individual U.S. plots we identify were infiltrated by law enforcement at their earliest stages; often informants or undercover agents persuaded perpetrators into thinking that they were part of a larger group and that they were an important asset to the cause. The plot then developed with the participation of the informant or agent, who might provide ideological and moral support and assist in acquiring weapons and organizing other logistics such as transportation, planning, and target selection. With these restrictions in place we found 17 cases, with a further two that were unclear about whether an informer was involved or not.

Our finding is that only 14 percent of the cases (15.7% with the possible cases) in over 20 years of plots involved what we would regard as true lone wolves, which we define as individuals who acted without direct outside guidance or face-to-face interaction with fellow conspirators or people they assumed to be like-minded followers of the jihadist cause. All but one of the lone-wolf attempts or attacks that we catalog followed the 9/11 attack. Additionally, 12 of the 17 definite lone wolves completed their attacks, and eight were lethal (see also Comparison of Successful Versus Foiled Attacks).

The category of “lone wolves” includes most notoriously the Fort Hood shootings by Major Nidal Hasan in 2009. He was inspired by Anwar al-Awlaki and sought his advice generally but was not directed by his instructions, as later Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab apparently was, as AQAP moved from inspiring

followers to deploying them as operatives. Other cases were less definitive in motivation. Zale Thompson, for example, attacked New York police officers with a hatchet in 2014. He was a recent convert to Islam who had consulted Islamist websites.¹⁶ Naser Abdo, an AWOL soldier himself, plotted to kill American soldiers in 2011.¹⁷ In court Abdo, a teenage convert to Islam, claimed to be acting to protest American military crimes against Muslims, and he expressed admiration for Nidal Hasan. A gun store clerk called his suspicious behavior to the attention of authorities. In 2010 Yonathan Melaku shot at military buildings in Northern Virginia, although the prosecutors agreed that he did not intend to harm people.¹⁸ He was a naturalized citizen, originally from Ethiopia, and a Marine reservist. He was arrested at Arlington National Cemetery, apparently intending to deface graves. He claimed to be protesting the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, but there was a question of mental illness. In 2009, but before the Fort Hood shootings, Abdulhakim Mujahid Muhammed fired on a military recruiting center in Little Rock, Arkansas, killing one soldier and wounding another.¹⁹ Born Carlos Bledsoe, he had converted to Islam while in college and spent time in Yemen, which may be where he was radicalized. He had been interviewed by the FBI but was not under surveillance. He claimed to be a member of al-Qa'ida but there was no evidence of contact.

Mohammed Reza Taheri-azar is an even more curious case, indeed on the margins of meeting our requirements since his allegiance is obscure. In 2006 he drove a Jeep into a crowd at his alma mater, the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. An Iranian who had lived in the United States since he was two, he claimed to be retaliating for the killing of Muslims and America's "immoral behavior."²⁰

In 2002, Hesham Mohamed Hadayet killed two people at the Los Angeles airport El Al Airlines check-in counter. A resident of Irvine, California, who had lived in the United States for 10 years, Hadayet was fervently anti-Israeli and possibly a former member of the Egyptian Islamist group Gama'a al-Islamiyya. Because his motive was never established (he was killed on the scene by El Al security officers), he is also at the margins of inclusion in the dataset.

In 2016 Edward Archer attacked a policeman in Philadelphia and claimed to be acting in the name of the Islamic State.²¹ He was awaiting sentencing for minor criminal charges, and his family said that he had mental health problems. Also in 2016, Omar Mateen killed 49 and injured dozens at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida, before being killed by police. The FBI had investigated him in 2013 and 2014, after

¹⁶ Michael Schwirtz and William K. Rashbaum. "Attacker With Hatchet Is Said to Have Grown Radical on His Own." *The New York Times*, October 24, 2014.

¹⁷ Molly Hennessy-Fiske, "Jason Abdo, Former AWOL Soldier, Sentenced in Ft. Hood Bomb Plot," *Los Angeles Times*, August 10, 2012; See also Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Naser Jason Abdo Sentenced to Life in Federal Prison in Connection with Killeen Bomb Plot," 2012 (www.fbi.gov/sanantonio/press-releases/2012/naser-jason-abdo-sentenced-to-life-in-federal-prison-in-connection-with-killeen-bomb-plot).

¹⁸ Since his intent was property damage, we could reasonably exclude him, but his actions risked harming people. See Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Man Pleads Guilty to Shooting Military Buildings in Northern Virginia," 2012 (www.fbi.gov/washingtondc/press-releases/2012/man-pleads-guilty-to-shooting-military-buildings-in-northern-virginia).

¹⁹ James Dao, "A Muslim Son, a Murder Trial, and Many Questions," *The New York Times*, February 16, 2010.

²⁰ Brenda Goodman, "Defendant Offers Details of Jeep Attack at University," *The New York Times*, March 8, 2006. See also his letter to the police at (www.investigativeproject.org/case/176/state-of-north-carolina-v-taheri-azar).

²¹ Jon Hurdle and Richard Pérez-Peña, "Gunman Said He Shot Philadelphia Officer for ISIS, Police Say," *The New York Times*, January 8, 2016.

coworkers at the county courthouse where he worked as a private security guard had warned that he might be dangerous, and again when his name came up as a possible associate of a U.S. citizen who conducted a suicide attack in Syria. But neither investigation uncovered evidence of a crime or grounds for continued surveillance, so the investigation had been closed.

Background: The U.S. data set lists 197 perpetrators whose country of residence at the time of the attack was known. Of those people, the great majority (81.7%) had a residence in the United States. Three of the 9/11 attackers had a joint residence in the United States and Germany. For those residing outside the United States, the majority are accounted for by 13 from Saudi Arabia involved in 9/11, and 12 in the United Kingdom, most of whom were involved in attacks on airliners headed to the United States.

There are 157 perpetrators whose U.S. state of residence at the time of the attack or planned attack is known. Although they are widely distributed, 27 of the perpetrators were living in New York, and 9 were living in New Jersey. As noted above, these are the most common states of residence, just as they are the most common target locations. This association is logical because it is easier to attack, or make plans to attack, close to home. Another 20 perpetrators were living in Florida, 14 in California, and 12 in Virginia, locations that also correspond to the most targeted locations.

Over half of the perpetrators are U.S. citizens (54%). If we remove the World Trade Center cases of 1993 and 9/11, 60.1 percent of perpetrators are U.S. citizens, although they may also be dual citizens. Citizens of Great Britain and Saudi Arabia follow in number, where the large 9/11 group accounts for the preponderance of Saudis, and two plots account for 15 British perpetrators. Without these four attacks or planned attacks, the proportion of U.S. citizens rises to 65.3 percent.

Overall, where we know the perpetrators' religion, 70.7 percent of perpetrators are Muslims from birth, 24 percent are converts to Islam and 5.3 percent are not Muslim at all. While it might seem unusual that a non-Muslim would take part in a jihadi attack/plot, this is not that unexpected. Those scholars who study the personal motivations (at an individual level) for joining a terrorist group or taking part in terrorist activities find that, far from ideology, many are driven by personal contacts²² or by the need for "excitement," or a "sense of belonging."²³ It should also be noted that a sense of injustice is often also cited by those who act,²⁴ and resentment at foreign policy is not confined to the Muslim population. If we remove two major events from the dataset, the 1993 World Trade Center bombing and the 9/11 attacks, which had unusually high numbers of perpetrators and in which all perpetrators were Muslim-born, the percentages change to 67.5 percent Muslim-born, 26.6 percent converts to Islam, and 5.9 percent non-Muslim. A notable convert, for example, was Dhiren Barot, who was born in India and raised as a Hindu in the United Kingdom. He trained with al-Qa'ida in Pakistan, entered the United States in 2000 on a student visa, and conducted

²² McCauley, C., and Moskaleiko, S., (2008) Mechanisms of Political Radicalization: Pathways Toward Terrorism. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 20, 415-433.

²³ See for example: Alonso, R., (2006) "Individual motivations for joining terrorist organizations: A comparative qualitative study on members of ETA and IRA." In J. Victoroff, (Ed.) (2006) *Tangled Roots: Social and Psychological Factors in the Genesis of Terrorism* (Oxford: IOS Press); Horgan, John (2005), *The Psychology of Terrorism* (London: Routledge).

²⁴ Borum, Randy (2004) *Psychology of Terrorism* (Tampa FL: University of South Florida).

extensive target surveillance before returning to the United Kingdom before 9/11. He was arrested in 2004, and in 2006 he was sentenced to a lengthy prison term for conspiracy to murder.

Organizational Affiliation: About a quarter (n=26) of the American plots we recorded could credibly be linked to a known organization, with another six having possible links. The majority of the known links were to al-Qa'ida and its proxy AQAP (20 total). Here we are not referring to claiming the act or praising it after the fact, but to bearing specific responsibility, insofar as the public record shows. More recent cases include six that were credibly linked to Islamic State. We also recorded whether a known group claimed credit for the attack or the attempt, regardless of our ability to establish a concrete connection. Claiming credit is extremely rare: only nine plots were “officially” claimed, of which six were completed while three were not. These include the 1993 and 9/11 World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks, the 2009 Christmas bombing attempt, the 2010 Times Square bombing attempt (linked to the Pakistani Taliban), the printer shipment plot in 2010, and the attack on the “First Annual Muhammed Art Exhibit and Contest” in Garland, Texas, in 2015. ISIS claimed credit for this shooting, in which one school security officer was wounded and the two shooters killed. The leader in the plot was Elton Simpson, who converted to Islam while in high school in Phoenix, Arizona. He had been arrested previously for trying to travel to Somalia and sentenced to probation and a fine. He had subsequently been in contact with an ISIS recruiter via Twitter, but the attack plan appeared to be his own. More recently, the 2016 vehicle and knife attack at Ohio State University, the Minnesota Mall stabbing at St Cloud, and the Orlando attack were all claimed by Islamic State, even though we have coded them as having no evidence of a connection to terrorist organizations, resulting in them fulfilling one of the criteria we set for lone wolf attacks (see above).

Foreign Fighters: There are two possible routes for attacks on the homeland. One comes from agents of a foreign group who are trained and directed from the outside. The 9/11 attacks are the most striking example. More recently, outside the United States, the November 2015 attacks in Paris and the March 2016 bombings in Brussels were mounted by ISIS from Syria, with the aid of a network of local citizens. The other route can be referred to as “home-grown” or “self-radicalized” terrorism, performed by individuals who are inspired by the ideology of a foreign group but not under its control or even known to its leaders. The two attack vectors merge when organizations such as al-Qa'ida or ISIS attract sympathizers through internet communications and then recruit them directly into the organization through personal contact or encrypted communications. We were therefore keen to record, where known, a series of variables relating to these issues; that is whether the attack was linked to or claimed by known terrorist organizations and whether any of the perpetrators in the failed and foiled data set had trained with terrorist organizations abroad or were returned foreign fighters.

The “foreign fighter” phenomenon has aroused intense concern, especially after the ISIS declaration of a caliphate in 2014 motivated numerous sympathizers in the West to join the struggle. Our data show that from 1993 through 2017 the threat to American security from returning foreign fighters was minimal, perhaps because many would-be fighters have been identified before they traveled. Europe has much more

of a returned foreign fighter problem, with greater numbers going and returning, and more lethal consequences, as the Paris and Brussels attacks in 2015 and 2016 demonstrate.²⁵

Although the actual experiences of the individuals in the dataset are hard to establish from published sources, our records show that only three of the actual or would-be perpetrators on whom we have information (or about whom reasonable assumptions can be made) in the U.S. dataset had actually fought or came close to fighting in a jihadist struggle abroad; they were responsible for four plots (in 2003 (2 plots), 2009, and 2015). All three returned foreign fighters were American citizens. These individuals include most recently Abdirahman Sheik Mohamud, who was thought possibly to represent the first of a pattern of ISIS returnees in 2015, although his link to ISIS is unsubstantiated. Mohamud is of Somali origin, a naturalized American citizen who lived in Columbus, Ohio. We count him as a returned foreign fighter because he trained in Syria and was apparently instructed to return home to commit an attack rather than continue to fight there (where his brother was killed). However, his specific group affiliation is unclear, and adherence to the al-Nusra Front is what he was charged with, rather than ISIS.²⁶

We also include as a returned foreign fighter Daniel Boyd, an American citizen residing in North Carolina who at least claimed to have fought in Afghanistan sometime between 1989 and 1992. He organized a group plotting attacks in the 2006-2009 period, including attacks on American military personnel, possibly at the Marine Corps base at Quantico, although the level of planning was rudimentary.²⁷ In the end Boyd cooperated with the government and testified against his co-conspirators.

The third returned foreign fighter was American citizen Christopher Paul, who like Mohamud was from Columbus, Ohio. He was a convert to Islam (he was born Paul Kenyatta Laws). He admitted joining al-Qa'ida in the early 1990s and fighting in Afghanistan and Bosnia before returning home with the intention of attacking here in the 1999-2000 period.²⁸ Paul probably posed the most serious threat among the three returned foreign fighters, and was involved in two of the plots in the U.S. data set. He had connections in Germany, possessed good bomb-making skills, and organized a group of followers in Ohio who trained in a local state park. It is worth noting that none of these foreign fighter plots reached an advanced stage of completion.

Overseas training: Although it is rare for U.S. attackers to have fought abroad, it is more common for them to have received overseas training. It is difficult to gain precise information on people's intentions for seeking training abroad, and it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between training and fighting. However, we think it is important to try to maintain a distinction between the two where possible.²⁹ Our data show

²⁵ Hegghammer and Nesser, "Assessing the Islamic State's Commitment to Attacking the West."

²⁶ Scott Shane, "Ohio Man Trained in Syria Is Charged With Planning Terrorism in U.S.," *The New York Times*, April 16, 2015.

²⁷ See Federal Bureau of Investigation, "North Carolina Resident Daniel Patrick Boyd Sentenced for Terrorism Violations," 2012 (www.fbi.gov/charlotte/press-releases/2012/north-carolina-resident-daniel-patrick-boyd-sentenced-for-terrorism-violations).

²⁸ See U.S. Department of Justice, "Ohio Man Pleads Guilty to Conspiracy to Bomb Targets in Europe and the United States," 2008 (www.justice.gov/archive/opa/pr/2008/June/08-nsd-492.html).

²⁹ However, the 2015 Homeland Security Committee Task Force combined training and acquiring combat experience in the same category.

that it is more likely that perpetrators of attacks or planned attacks against the U.S have trained outside the country rather than have fought abroad, accounting 21.8 percent of those individuals we have information about. However, if we omit the 19 9/11 hijackers in that complex plot, from 1993 through 2017 we identify 20 (12.5%) perpetrators who trained abroad, out of the pool of 160 perpetrators for whom information is available.

It is difficult to discern a pattern or trend in such small numbers, although most of them had trained in Afghanistan or the tribal areas of Pakistan in al-Qa'ida training camps. Bosnia was also a preferred training ground. One perpetrator trained in Saudi Arabia, another in Ethiopia, and Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab apparently trained in Yemen with AQAP. Only two instances of foreign training occurred before 9/11: Ramzi Youcef and Ahmad Ressam, both linked to al-Qa'ida and trained in the use of explosives. We might also count Dhiren Barot, since he started reconnaissance and planning before 9/11 although his plot was discovered later. He was a committed al-Qa'ida operative, not an amateur volunteer. The most recent case in the U.S data set is Abdirahman Sheik Mohamud, whose plot was discovered in 2015.

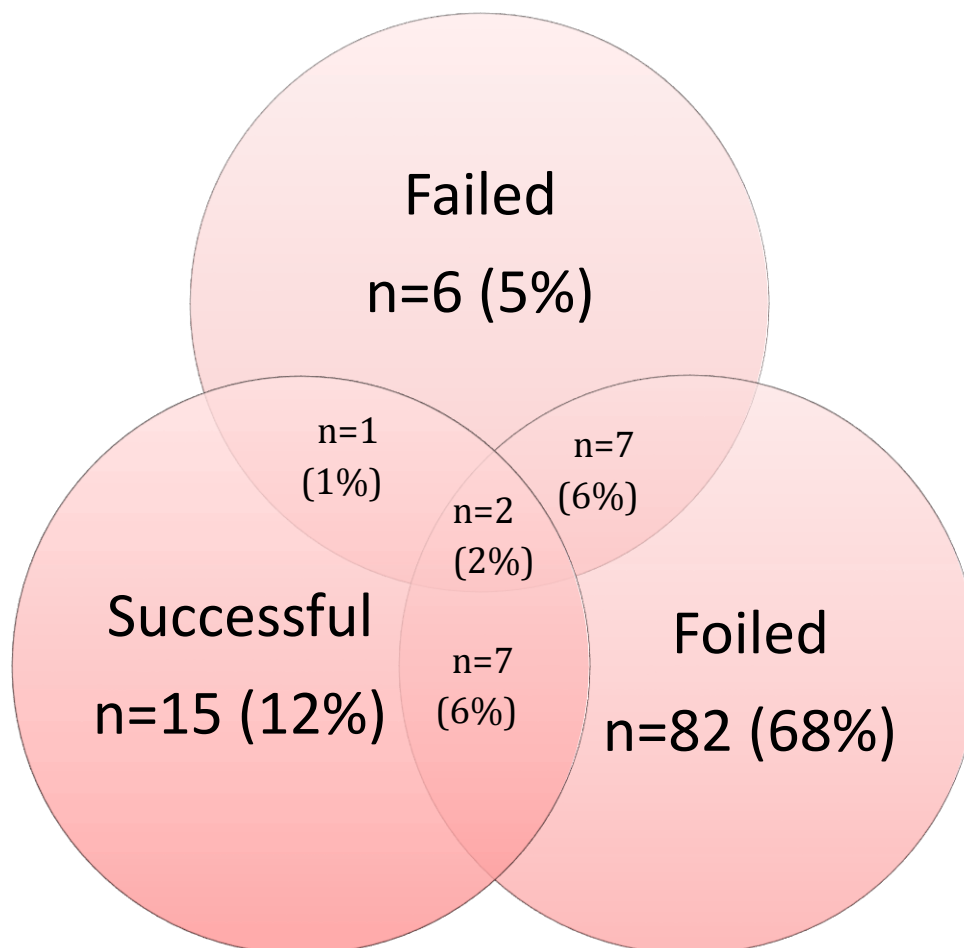
Some of these returned trainees may have traveled initially because they wanted to fight in the local conflict theatre and were then persuaded to return home without fighting, but it is hard to be sure (Najibullah Zazi and his two accomplices may fit this pattern). The important conclusion is that even if foreign fighters and those seeking training are combined, the numbers for the United States are still very small, fewer than 25 people. The kind of useful training for aspiring terrorists is most likely to be in the use of explosives, but training is not a guarantee that they can build a device that will explode. Thus, al-Qa'ida training for those in the Najibullah Zazi, Adis Medunjanin, and Zarein Ahmedzay conspiracy and the Faisal Shazad Time Square bombing case did not insure success. Note also that even though shoe bomber Richard Reid and Abdulmutallab did not build their own bombs, their plots nonetheless failed due to technical problems.

Plot Outcomes

In the context of all of the plots that were identified over the 24-year time period studied, attacks that can be classified as successful were comparatively rare, with only 15 considered entirely successful. A further seven were partially successful and partially foiled; one was partially successful and partially failed; and two contained elements of success, with further aspects of the attack that were both failed and foiled (see Figure 3). It is important to recall that completed and successful are not the same thing. Whilst all of those considered to be successful were completed, just over 40 percent of those that were completed were not successful. In these cases although the planned sequence of actions was carried through, the attack failed or was foiled at the final stages.

The U.S. database currently contains 120 jihadist plots with known outcomes occurring in the United States between February 1993 and February 2017. One case did not proceed but we do not know why. The Venn diagram in Figure 3 shows the number of cases (and the percent rounded to the nearest whole number) of cases that were successful, failed and foiled, along with the numbers for those that had combined outcomes.

Figure 3. Venn Diagram showing the percentage of U.S. cases with each individual or combined outcome.



The large majority of 68.3 percent of jihadist plots in or against the U.S. homeland were completely foiled, with a further 7.5 percent partially foiled, and 5.8 percent foiled as well as failing. Very few attempts failed completely, independent of external intervention, because of some mistake or reluctance on the part of the perpetrators (six, to be exact), although a further 10 contained elements of failure.

Of the 98 foiled plots, most were foiled by the authorities (80.6%) but 19 plots were foiled by the public (such as the “Christmas bomber,” Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, or Richard Reid the “shoe bomber,” both tackled by alert fellow passengers on the aircraft they meant to bring down, even if their bombs would probably have failed to detonate).

The plots that were foiled were coded according to eight categories, describing the way in which they were foiled. For four of the plots, the accounts did not contain enough information to determine the foil type, leaving a sample of 94 for analysis. First the primary method by which they were foiled was recorded. This describes the *first* action that took place in the sequence of events that led to the plot being foiled. A second variable is then coded to record any second action that was taken. Thus, for example, a community tip off may be the first action that revealed that an attack was planned, but which was then followed up by surveillance or the involvement of an undercover officer. Likewise, initial general surveillance, such as that resulting from posts on social media, might be followed up by a raid, or the involvement of a paid informant.

Figure 4: The percentage of plots foiled at the initial stage by each form of intervention

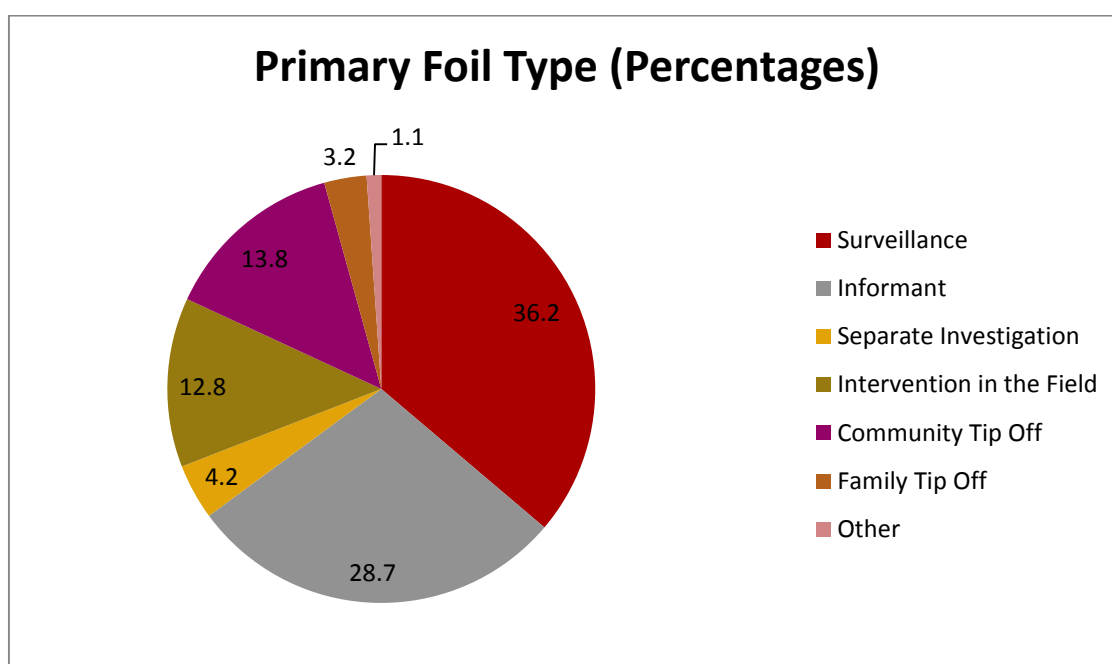


Figure 4 shows that, at the initial stages, surveillance or informants were involved in the majority of plots foiled by U.S. government authorities. It is sometimes difficult to gauge the exact way people came to the attention of the authorities. In some cases their activities came to the attention of the authorities as a result of their postings on social media, and in the absence of any information on specific community tip offs, we assumed that general monitoring of certain sites by security staff alerted them to those involved, before active individual surveillance per se was implemented. Future research could identify which cases are picked up through general monitoring in order to understand the efficacy of such techniques; however, for the current research we have counted these cases as surveillance. Interestingly, of the 97 foiled plots for which we have information, 13 of the foiled plots involved one or more foreign governments providing assistance, demonstrating the importance of intelligence cooperation and information sharing. These governments were the United Kingdom (6 plots), Saudi Arabia (3 plots), Pakistan (3 plots), and one plot each for Lebanon, Russia, and the United Arab Emirates.³⁰ For example, in 2010 AQAP's efforts to send two

³⁰ Some plots involved the assistance of more than one foreign government.

Hewlett-Packard printers with bombs concealed in the ink cartridges to Chicago via Fed Ex and UPS were thwarted by a tip from the Saudi government.

Despite the dominance of early government intervention, in 13 cases community tip offs and in three cases, family tip offs, set the investigation in motion. Employees of businesses where perpetrators tried to purchase guns or material for explosives sometimes turned them in, with a total of 17 percent of those foiled attributable to community or family tip offs (see Figure 3). The actions of those in the field helped to foil 12.8 percent of the cases and a small number of cases were foiled through separate investigations and other means. In the U.S data set there were no cases that were foiled via raids.

If we add in the subsequent means by which the planned attacks were foiled, (where there was one), a total of 127 foil types are found, and the resultant percentages show an increase in the proportion of cases in which informants played a role, to 41.7 percent. This is accounted for by the large number of U.S. cases in which initial intelligence was followed by the involvement of undercover officers before the perpetrator was eventually arrested. Of the 98 foiled cases, very nearly 40 percent (39.8%) involved some kind of sting operation. Although human intelligence and undercover operatives are frequently used in non-U.S. counter-terrorism operations, in other countries we do not see reports of their specific activities reported in the press in the way that they are in the United States. What is certainly very different is the use of the kind of sting operations where a perpetrator goes through with a disarmed attack to completion before being arrested at the “fake scene.” These are extremely rare outside the United States, where evidence is usually compiled prior to a surprise raid and/or arrest.

Of the 16 cases that involved a failure of plans, six failed completely, three had elements of success, and seven also involved interventions that foiled the plot. Six of the cases that failed did so because of technical problems, and in all of these cases bombs failed to explode or substances to ignite. There were nine cases in which there was some kind of intentional failure whereby the perpetrator abandoned the plot, for example, when they were unable to buy a gun or an associate was arrested. These “changes of heart” seem, anecdotally, to also relate to increased surveillance of a target, or an awareness that they might have been detected, and therefore show that visible policing may go some way toward deterrence.

Stage of Discovery and Plot Progress

Our research project defined and identified five distinct plot stages, for both discovery and implementation, with an additional stage in discovery to code those cases where the plot was not discovered until “after the fact,” that is for example, when the plot was discovered only as a result of an arrest made for other reasons. These stages include the perpetrators’ initial communication of intent, attempts to acquire capabilities, practice and training for an attack, specification of target and method, and the final implementation stage (the “out the door” phase, such as placing a bomb at the target).³¹ While these stages are defined almost identically for the two variables, a case can be coded at different stages in relation to how far it progressed as compared to when it was stopped. Thus, as noted above, the stage of discovery is not always the same

³¹ The progression is not necessarily linear; sometimes targets and methods are selected before an attempt to acquire capabilities, for example.

as the stage at which the plot was halted. This may occur when, for example, a plot is discovered in the early stages, infiltrated by an informer, and allowed to “run” until there is enough evidence to bring about a conviction. Our data include “successful” cases where the stage of discovery is the same as the plot progress, in that it is only discovered when it is being implemented.

Table 1 shows the cross-tabulation of number of cases in the data at each stage of discovery by the number of cases at each stage of plot progress, showing the relationship between when a plot was first noticed and the stage it progressed to before it was halted. There are seven plots where we do not have enough information to determine the stage at which they were discovered, leaving 114 plots for analysis. Of these, 30 (26.3%) were only discovered at the point at which they were being implemented, although not all of these turned out to be “successful.”

A total of 61 plots were discovered at the stage of communication of intent, and of these 13 were halted right there, with another 21 stopped as the would-be perpetrators sought to acquire capability for their attack. Nevertheless, 14 plots ran until they had a plan laid out, and 12 were stopped at the final point of implementation. These are likely to be “stings” in which undercover officers provided inert weapons and waited until the perpetrator detonated what they thought was a bomb, or collected what they thought were operational weapons. Aside from the stings, relatively few cases had progressed very far before they were stopped, showing that the early detection of intent has proved successful for U.S cases, albeit with associated criticism related to the possibility of entrapment.

	Stage of Discovery						
Plot Progress	Communication of Intent	Acquiring Capability	Practice and Training	Plan Laid Out	Implementation	After the Fact	Total
Communication of Intent	13	0	0	0	0	1	14
Acquiring Capability	21	9	0	0	0	0	30
Practice and training	1	0	1	0	0	0	2
Plan Laid Out	14	4	0	6	0	2	26
Implementation	12	0	0	0	30	0	42
Total	61	13	1	6	30	3	114

Table 1. Cross tabulation of plot progress by stage of discovery. Actual number of cases is shown.

Comparison of Successful Versus Foiled Attacks in the United States

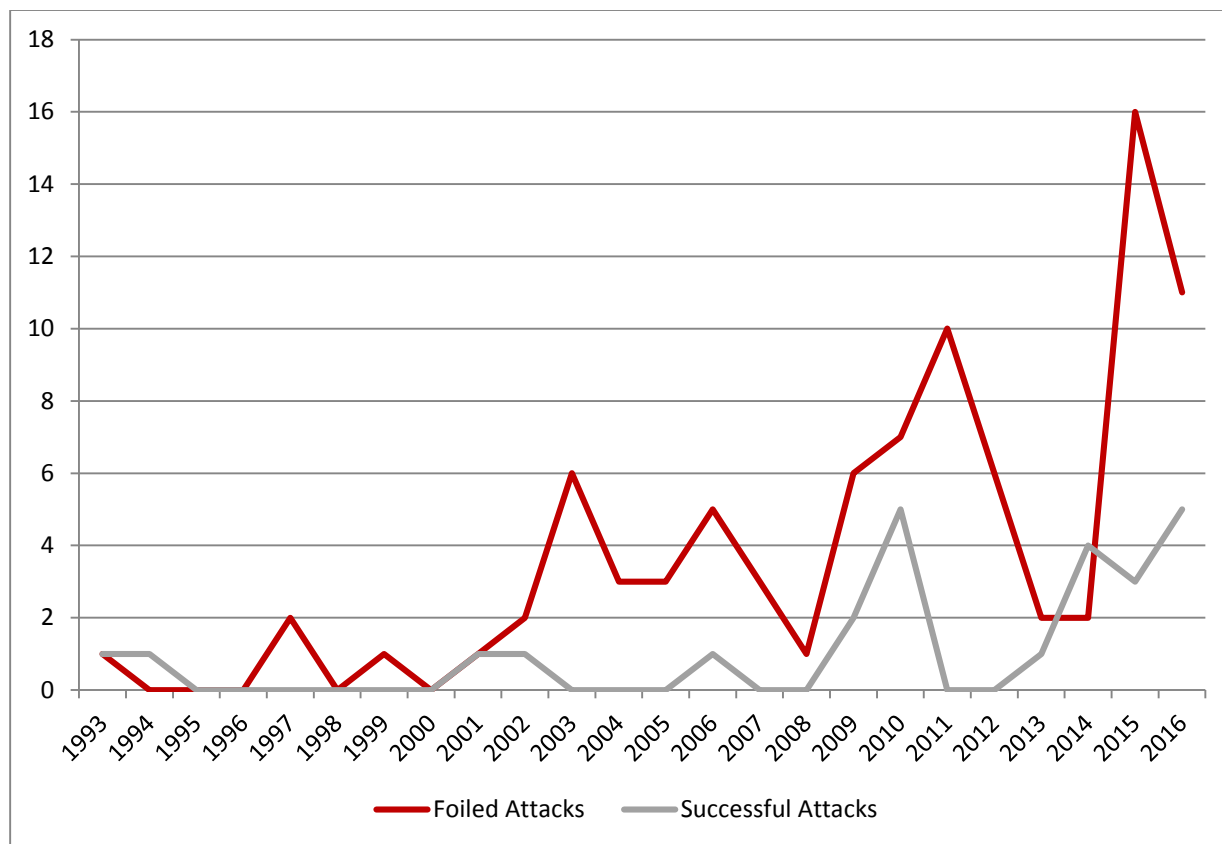
Defining the Samples for Analysis

In order to compare the nature of attacks that were successful with those that were not, we first had to select cases for comparison. It was decided that cases that contained *any* element of success would be counted as successful for this analysis. That is, even if the attack was cut short (partially foiled – a total of seven cases), or partially failed (one case), the perpetrators in this sample still achieved *some* of their objectives. There were two further cases that were partially foiled and partially failed as well as successful, and these too were included as successful. This resulted in a total of 25 attacks for analysis, 15 of which were considered entirely successful. By contrast there were 82 cases that were entirely foiled, and a further seven that were both foiled and contained an element of failure. These 89 planned attacks form the comparison group. This leaves six plots that failed, with no element of success or having been foiled and these are excluded from the analyses in this whole section of the report. There is one further plot where we do not know the reason why it did not proceed, which is also excluded. This means that there are 114 U.S. cases for analysis, 25 of which succeeded in some measure, and 89 that were entirely foiled, or foiled with an element of failure. *It is important therefore to note that in the following sections when referring to successful attacks these maybe partially successful as well as foiled or failed, and those referred to as foiled may also have failed in some way.*

Frequency Over Time

Figure 5 shows that, broadly speaking, as the number of attempted attacks increases so too does the number of attacks which are able to progress to stage at which they had some form of success. There are only two years, 1994 and 2014, where the frequency of successful attacks outnumbers the foiled attempts. Here we have not included the data for 2017, as the year does not have complete data.

Figure 5. Frequency of successful and foiled attacks by year (1993-2016).

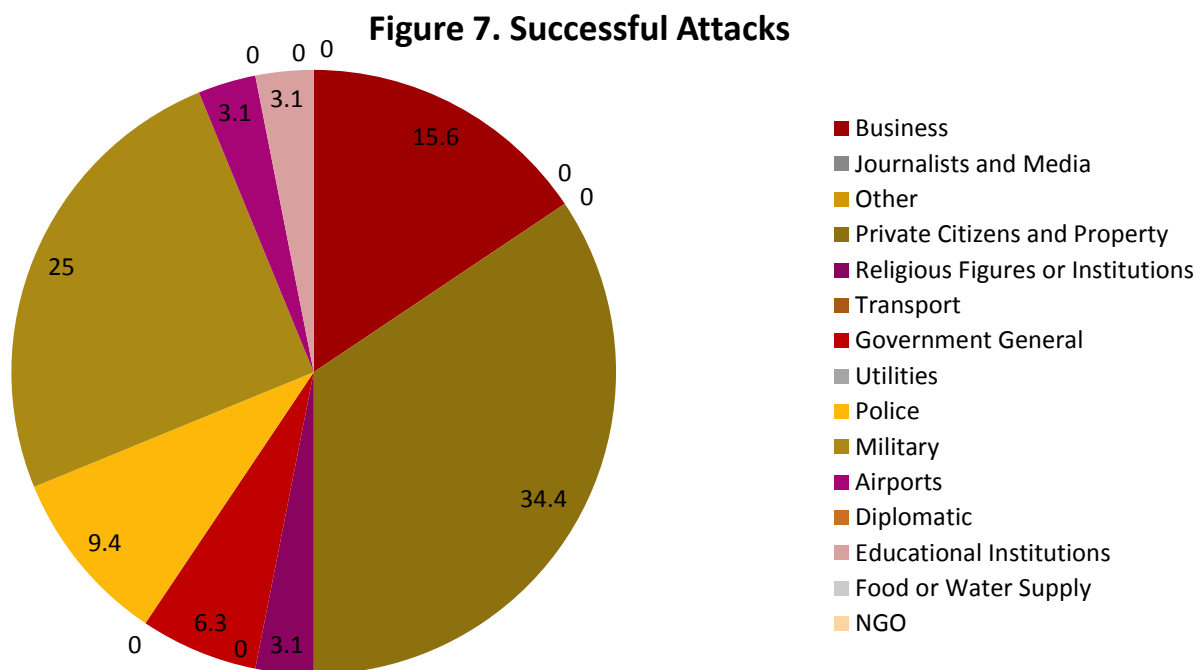
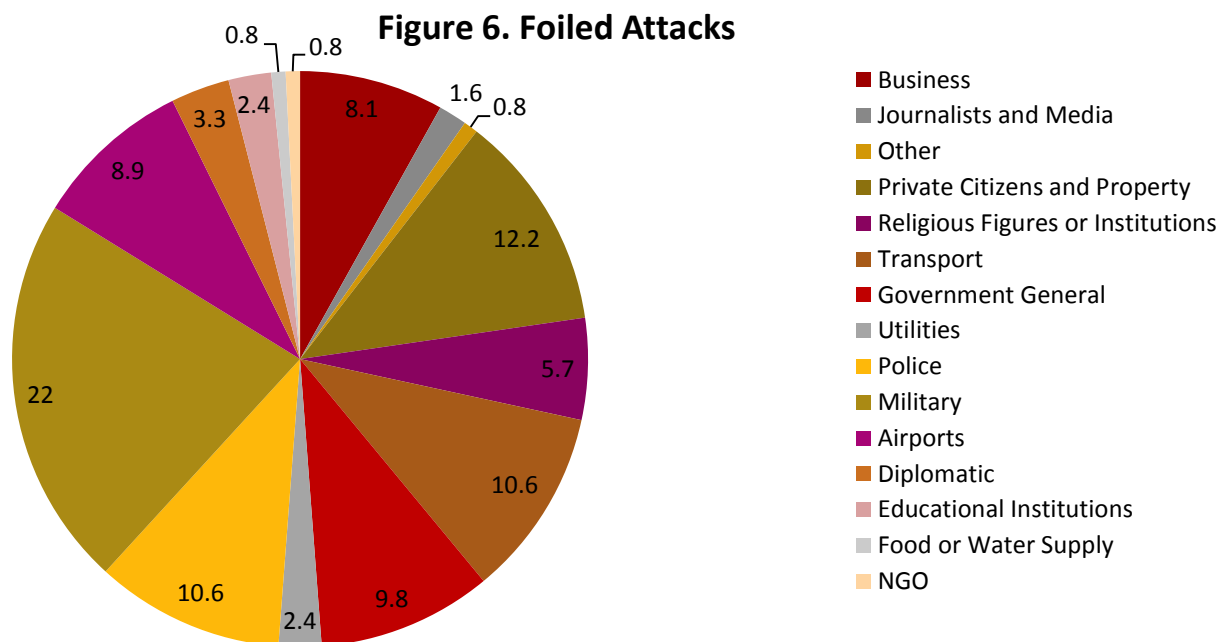


Targets

Of the 114 cases for analysis, the specific target was unknown in four of the foiled attacks. Across all of the 110 remaining attacks or planned attacks, the successful attacks involved a total of 32 different targets, while the foiled attacks were planned against a total of 123 targets. It is important to note that because some of the successful cases were only partially successful, not all of the targets in the successful group may have been actually achieved. For example, in a case cited at the start of this report, Abdulhakim Mujahid Muhammad set out to kill a rabbi in Nashville, before going on to shoot military staff at a recruitment center. The attack against rabbi's house failed, but Muhammad went on to shoot two soldiers - an aspect of his plan that was both completed and successful. This means that both a religious target and a military target will have been recorded as part of a successful attack, but that in fact only the military portion of the attack was actually successful. Nonetheless, despite this caveat, only a small number of attacks are affected and so the figures presented here give an indication of the differences between targets that are aspired to and those that are actually hit.

The targets were classified according to a series of descriptive categories, as described earlier in the report, and the number and percentage of each type of target are shown in Figure 6 and Figure 7. Note that the percentages are calculated within their own category of successful or foiled, such that, for example, around 10 percent of the foiled cases aimed for police related targets.

Figures 6 and 7. The percentage of all foiled targets and the percentage of all successful targets that are aimed at each of the target types.



The pie charts in Figures 6 and 7 show the percentage of all foiled targets and the percentage of all successful targets that are aimed at each of the target types. Looking at the foiled cases first, it is clear that more types of target are represented in attacks that were stopped than there are in those that were carried

through. A total of 14 different types of targets were aspired to in the foiled attempts, albeit some of them in very small numbers. However, when it comes to the successful cases, far fewer types of target are actually hit. Nonetheless, for some types of target, the percentages for foiled and successful are very similar. For example, 22 percent of the foiled actions hoped to hit a military target, and 25 percent of the successful actions did. Likewise, 10.6 percent of the would-be attacks were aimed at police targets, and 9.4 percent of the successful attacks were against police. These figures are surprisingly similar, but there are some notable differences between other types of targets that are aspired to and those that are present in successful and partially successful attacks. The 10.6 percent of attacks that were planned against public transport systems (non-aviation) were not paralleled by any successful attacks at all. Fifty percent of the successful attacks are accounted for by attacks on private citizens and businesses (which in practice are places where private citizens can be found, such as bars and restaurants). These statistics are not surprising, as they illustrate the tendency of attackers to focus on softer targets. However, these two target types account for only 20.3 percent of the foiled attacks, where foiled attacks were directed at a wider range of potential targets.

Mode of Attack

As noted earlier, each attack or planned attack may involve more than one attack type, for example, an attack planned to be an armed assault ending in a suicide bomb. Therefore the total number of attack types is more than the total number of plots or attacks in the sample. Nonetheless, it is still possible to examine the *proportion* of all types of attacks planned or carried out which are of each form, and whether they differ between those that were successful and those that were foiled. As noted above, there may be a number of attack types counted as successful which in the end were not successfully carried out, but these numbers will be very small.

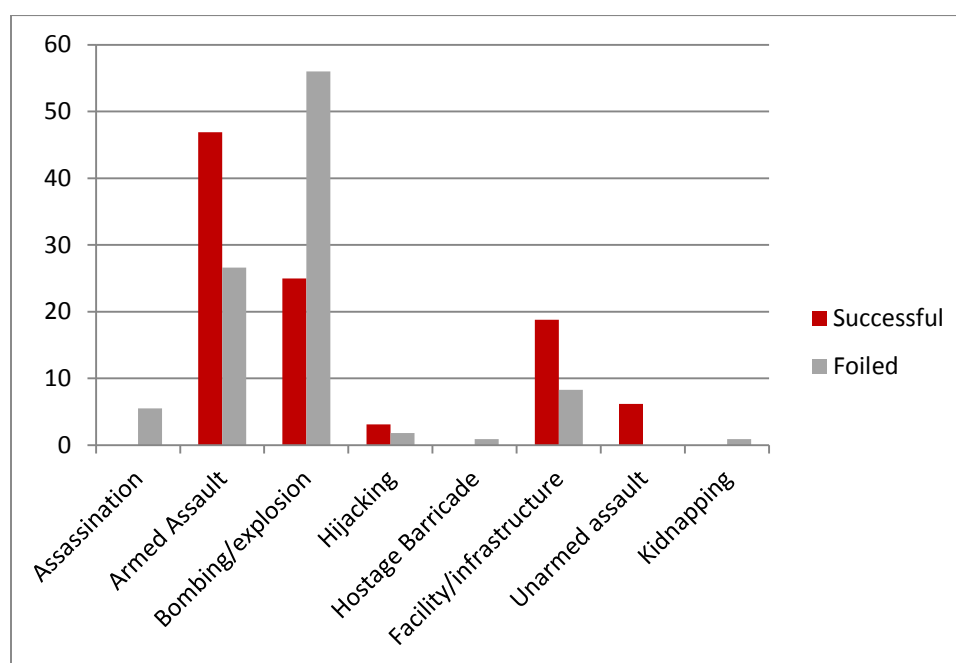
Analysis shows that there were 109 separate attacks planned or carried out within the 89 foiled attacks and 32 discrete attack forms found within the 25 successful attacks. The percentage of these totals that were accounted for by each attack type for both successful and foiled attacks are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 shows that there were no successful kidnappings, hostage barricades or assassinations in the data set, and only one successful hijacking. The three forms of hostage taking were not attempted very often either, with one foiled kidnapping, one foiled hostage barricade and two foiled hijackings. There were six assassination plots, but all of them were foiled. The unarmed assaults were vehicle attacks, and both of them were successful. The most interesting result is that while bombings and armed assaults dominate both successful and foiled attacks, bombings are more prevalent in the foiled attacks (56%), with armed assaults at 26.6 percent, while the reverse is true in the successful attacks. This is shown clearly in Figure 8. Here, 46.9 percent of successful attacks were armed assaults while only 25 percent were bombings. As mentioned previously, this result may be because the foiled attacks that used a sting approach involved perpetrators who were influenced to use bombs so that inert explosives could be put in place. Alternatively, armed assaults, which include guns, knives and other sharp instruments, may be seen more often than bombs in successful attacks because of the relative ease with which they are obtained.

Table 2. The number and percentage of modes of attack found in successful and foiled attacks.

Mode of Attack	Successful (n)	Successful (%)	Foiled (n)	Foiled (%)
Assassination	0	0	6	5.5
Armed Assault	15	46.9	29	26.6
Bombing/explosion	8	25	61	56
Hijacking	1	3.1	2	1.8
Hostage Barricade	0	0	1	0.9
Facility/infrastructure	6	18.8	9	8.3
Unarmed assault	2	6.2	0	0
Kidnapping	0	0	1	0.9
TOTAL	32	100	109	100

Figure 8. The percentage of successful and foiled attacks by planned or actual mode of attack.



Perpetrators

Attack team size: In order to determine whether there is any difference in the attack team size for successful attacks as compared to those that were foiled, the data were analyzed using an independent sample t-test. It is possible to develop two alternative hypotheses about the relationship between team size and success. First, it could be proposed that a larger team would be more likely to be successful since they would have more resources than smaller teams. Alternatively, a smaller team, or lone attackers, might be more likely to be successful because the plot is less likely to be detected. There are fewer people who could be identified preparing the plot or who might accidentally reveal themselves or their intentions prior to the attack taking place. For this reason we did not specify the direction of our prediction over attack

team size and its relation to success, and a two-tailed test of statistical significance is therefore appropriate. The analysis revealed that the mean number of perpetrators (where known) for the foiled attacks was 1.94 (SD=1.8), while the mean number of perpetrators in successful attacks was 2.16 (SD=3.7). This difference is not statistically significant ($t=0.402$, $df=107$, $p=0.69$). However, we know that in the successful sample, the attacks of 9/11 involved 19 perpetrators, and so the analysis was repeated without this attack in the sample. The results of this analysis still showed no statistically significant difference between the attack team sizes, with successful attacks having a mean team size of 1.46 (SD=1.29) and the foiled attacks having a mean team size of 1.94 (SD=1.84) ($t=-1.20$, $df=106$, $p=0.23$).

Lone Wolves: In order to examine whether lone wolves were more likely to be successful than those who were not working alone, or thought that they were not working alone, a 2x2 chi square analysis was conducted. Table 3 shows the number of successful compared to foiled attacks conducted by the 19 perpetrators that we deemed to be lone wolves, or possibly lone wolves as compared to those who were working in teams. Here again, completely failed attacks were not included, leaving 114 cases for analysis.

Table 3. The number of foiled and successful attacks that were conducted by “lone wolves”

Plot outcome	Not lone wolves	Lone wolves or possible lone wolves
Foiled attacks	82	7
Successful attacks	13	12
Total	95	19

Reading across the table we can see that of those attacks that were successful 12 (48%) were conducted by lone wolves compared to 13 (52%) that were not. That compares in foiled attacks to 7.9 percent that were lone wolf attacks and 92.1 percent that were not. Thus, reading down the lone wolves column of the table, 63.2 percent had some success in their attack plans. This difference is statistically significant ($X^2=22.64$, $df=1$, $p<0.001$ (Fisher’s Exact test – two tailed).

However, this analysis is complicated by the fact that, in the U.S. data, 39 cases involved sting operations (32.2% of the total sample). By our definition of lone wolves, these people (even if working alone) would not be counted, since they *thought* that they were involved with others in developing the plans for an attack. These cases are also, by definition, all foiled attacks and so could skew the data such that those who are not lone wolves are more likely not to succeed. For this reason the stings were removed from the analysis and the statistics re-run. In relation to Table 3, this means that the 39 sting operations have been removed from the 82 foiled attacks by non-lone wolves, leaving this cell counting 43 cases. The total number of attacks analyzed is now 75 (114-39). As far as the new computed Chi-square statistic, the difference remains statistically significant ($X^2=10.19$, $df=1$, $p=0.004$ (Fisher’s Exact test, two tailed). In conclusion, even discounting sting operations, lone wolf attackers are more likely to be successful than groups.

The Outcome of Lone Wolf Attacks

Of the 19 lone wolf (or possible lone wolf) attacks, 12 had at least some success, and of these, eight resulted in at least one fatality aside from the perpetrator themselves. The other four successful attacks resulted in injuries to persons other than the attacker themselves. Four of the perpetrators were themselves killed and another four were injured. In total, over the 12 successful lone wolf attacks, 73 people were killed and 159 injured, not including the perpetrators themselves. The majority of these are accounted for by the Fort Hood shootings, the Orlando attack and the New York/New Jersey bombing.

Stage of Discovery and Plot Progress

Earlier in the report, data were presented which showed how far the plot had progressed before it came to the attention of the authorities, and how those stages related to when the plot was actually discovered. In comparing successful and foiled attacks, it is clear that all of the successful attacks had progressed to implementation before they were discovered. It is therefore only of interest here to examine the progress and discovery of the foiled attacks. Table 4 shows the number of attacks that had reached each stage of development when they were discovered and the number that had reached each stage when they were stopped. The total number of attacks is different in the two table columns because there are five cases where information about the stage of discovery is missing. It is interesting to note that 16 of the attacks that were foiled ran to completion, although only four were not known about until they happened. This means that attacks can still be foiled even when they are at the final stage of implementation, and suggests that the other 12 cases that were completed were most likely sting operations that ran to controlled completion in order to gain enough evidence for a prosecution.

Table 4. The stage of plot progress and plot discovery for foiled attacks.

Foiled Plots Only	Plot progress when it was discovered	Plot progress before being halted
Communication of Intent	60	13
Acquiring Capability	13	30
Practice and training	1	2
Plan Laid Out	5	24
Implementation	4	16
After the fact	1	NA
Total	84	89

Comparison of U.S. Actual and Planned Attacks to Those Occurring in Allied Countries (2010-2016)

A Time Frame to Sample

The non-U.S. data set, as of June 2017, contains 314 attacks or planned attacks occurring or planned to occur in NATO or EU countries, with the addition of Australia and New Zealand. However, as noted earlier in the report, it is likely that the non-U.S. sample is biased toward completed attacks rather than unsuccessful plots, since these are more likely to make the English language news or other major news outlets. It is also true that there is more detail available to code in accounts of more recent cases than there is for attacks or plots that occurred earlier in the time frame considered for the U.S. cases. Furthermore, the recording period for the U.S. cases stopped in February 2017, whereas the world data is coded through June 2017. In order to take the most complete and detailed data for comparison and over the same time period, we compare all U.S. cases to all non-U.S. cases within the time frame 1st January 2010, when there was an increase in the number of U.S. cases, through to 31st December 2016, the last full year of data coding.

Frequency of Attacks or Planned Attacks

Taking the seven complete years from 2010 to 2016, a total of 209 actual or planned attacks were identified (whether failed, foiled or successful), the majority of which were aimed at targets in only one country. There were two cases where the target country was unknown and four cases that involved targets in more than one country, meaning that there are 211 target countries in total. It is interesting to note that within the time frame sampled, most attacks are focused on targets in one country alone, crossing national boundaries perhaps adding unneeded extra planning or resources. A U.S. target only once appeared in conjunction with an overseas target in this period, with U.S. plots appearing to be relatively self-contained. There are certainly, in the wider data set, a very small number of cases where a plot may spill over into Canada, and this accounts for the one case in this sample; a 2013 plot to derail a train travelling between Toronto and New York. However, in the wider data set, very few attacks are planned to take place in both the United States and Europe and none in the United States and Australia.

Of the 211 planned or actual attacks (including multiple attacks in the same plot) in this time period, 76 (36%) occurred or were planned to occur in the United States. The next most targeted countries were France with 37, Germany with 22 and the United Kingdom with 19. Here again we should bear in mind that we might be picking up more stories from these close neighbors because they are more likely to be reported in the British press. Other countries with higher numbers of plots or attacks within this time frame were Turkey with 13, Australia with 11, Belgium with eight and Canada and Denmark both with six. Denmark's attacks are mainly associated with the publication of cartoons perceived to be anti-Islamic.

As in the previous section of the report, for the next analyses (unless otherwise stated) we eliminated those cases that failed purely by internal mechanisms, whether because of technical or human failings. Once those six cases were removed from the 2010-2016 sample 203 cases were left for further analysis. We divided these cases into those that had any degree of success (even if they were partially foiled or partially failed), as compared to those that were foiled, even if they also failed in part as well.

Figure 9. The number of successful and foiled attacks against U.S. and allied countries (2010-2016).

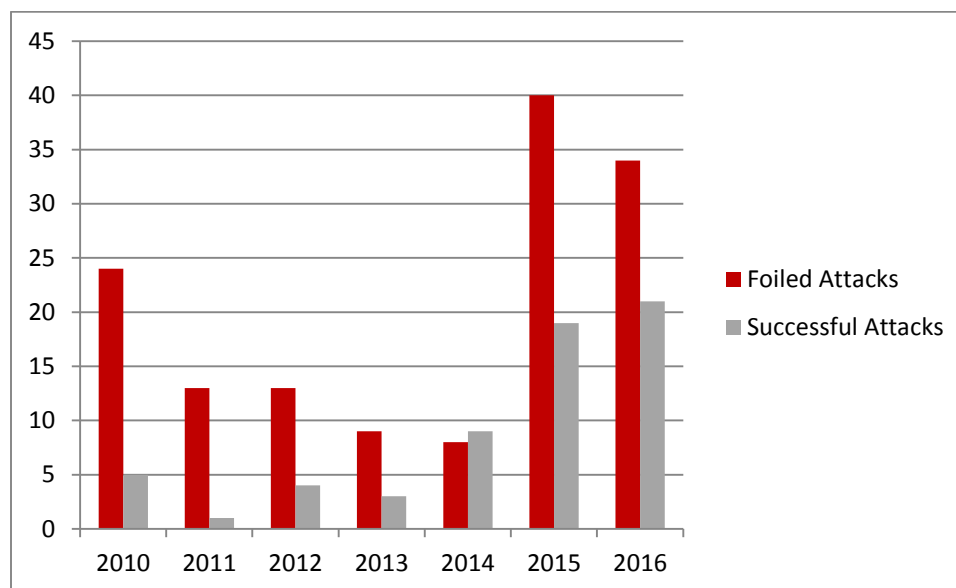


Figure 9 shows a large increase in both attempts and successes in 2015 and 2016. The non-U.S. data for 2017 certainly seems set to continue this trend with 22 cases recorded through to early June, 10 of which were successful.

Foil Rate by Country

Taking only those nine countries (within our remit) that experienced at least one successful attack between 2010 and 2016, it is possible to compare the number of successful attacks to those that were foiled. The six completely failed attacks are not counted here and neither are the two attacks where the country was not known. In the four cases where more than one country was targeted, both elements of the plot were foiled, but we do not know which country played the dominant role in prevention, and both are credited with the foil.

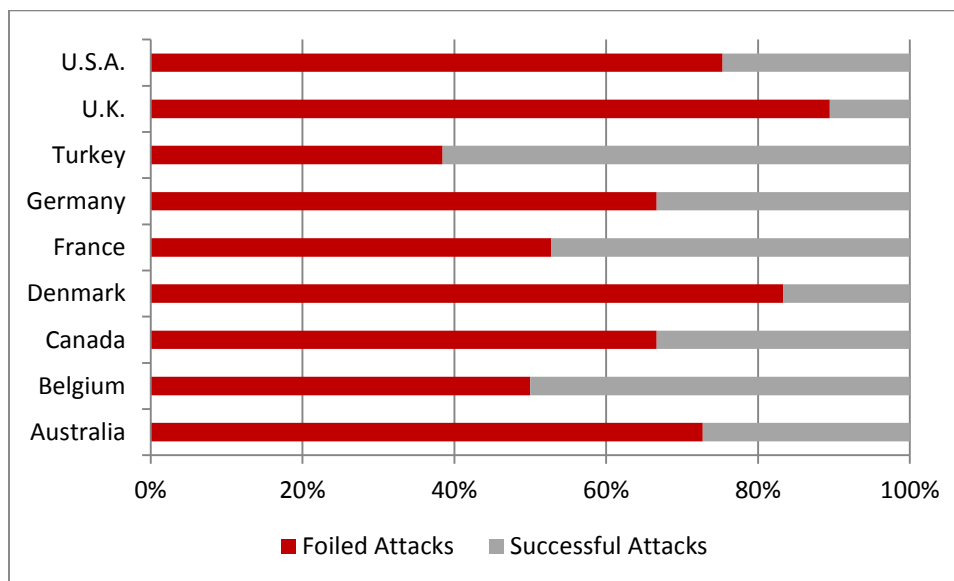
The data appear to show that the United Kingdom and the United States have a higher “stop rate” than other countries such as France and Germany. However, here again we stress that having our research team based in the United States and the United Kingdom may mean that we are picking up many more accounts of foiled attacks for these countries. Similarly, as previously mentioned, it might be unlikely that we would record many foiled cases for a country like Turkey, and thus our data might show Turkey’s intervention success rate as lower than it really is. Figure 10 shows the percentage of foiled to successful plots for each of these countries, but a meaningful analysis should take into account the absolute numbers involved. For example, the figures for Denmark are based on only six attempts in total. In addition, intervention success is also a function of the size of the threat a country faces, in relation to the resources the country has to counter the threat. For example, we have no information on the number of people a country has identified as potential threats or placed under surveillance, nor do we have a complete understanding of the resources a country has to conduct investigations. These factors are surely relevant to intervention success.

Those countries that did not experience any successful attacks, but nonetheless foiled a number of plots were Albania, Austria, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden, each with one foiled plot, and Italy and Spain each with three foiled plots.

Table 5. The number of foiled and successful cases for each of nine countries (2010-2016)

Country	Foiled	Successful
Australia	8	3
Belgium	4	4
Canada	4	2
Denmark	5	1
France	19	17
Germany	14	7
Turkey	5	8
United Kingdom	17	2
United States	55	18

Figure 10. The percentage of foiled to successful attacks for each of nine countries (2010-2017).



Foiled Type

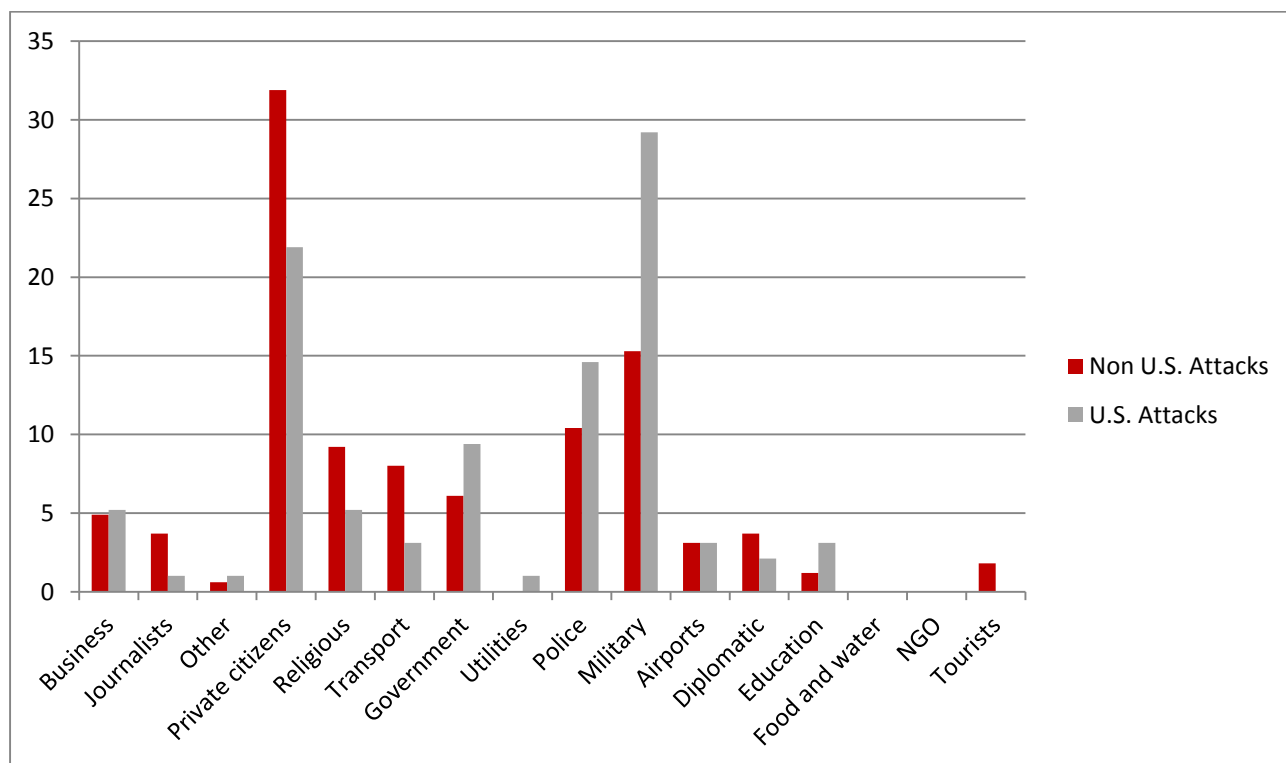
Over the seven years studied, 81.7 percent of the U.S. cases were foiled by the authorities, as were 85.4 percent of the non-U.S. cases. As described earlier in the report, plots that were foiled were coded according to eight categories, describing the way in which they were foiled. First, the primary method by which they were foiled was recorded. This describes the *first* action that took place in the sequence of events that led to the plot being foiled. A second variable is then coded to record any second action that

was taken. Thus, for example, a plot might first be identified by surveillance and then followed up by the infiltration of an informant or by a police raid. Taking the primary foil type only, around half of all cases are first identified by surveillance both in the U.S. and the non-U.S. cases (48% and 50.7% respectively). However, the initial use of an informant is much higher in the U.S. cases, at 34 percent, while in the non-U.S. cases this is only recorded as 2.6 percent for the years sampled. It is possible that the non-U.S. cases do use informants more often, but that they are not reported. Certainly, there have been prominent court cases in the United Kingdom on which reporting of the details of the plot disruption have been restricted owing to national security concerns. Finally, 28.6 percent of the non-U.S. cases were foiled by actions in the field, compared to only 12 percent of the U.S. cases. If we add in the secondary foil type, the use of informants in the United States rises even higher to involvement in almost half of all foiled attacks (49.4%), while the non-U.S. cases remain low at 4.5 percent.

Targets

For those cases where the target type was known, targets were recorded according to a series of categories, and each attack or planned attack may have more than one target. For the 2010-2017 U.S. sample, 96 different targets were identified, and for the non-U.S. sample 163 different targets were identified³². To facilitate comparison, the number of each target type was converted into a percentage for the U.S. and non-U.S. attacks or planned attacks. These percentages are shown in the graph in Figure 11.

Figure 11. The percentage of attacks directed at each category of target in the U.S and non-U.S. attacks or planned attacks.



³² Completely failed attacks are not included here.

Figure 11 shows that the main difference between the U.S. attacks and planned attacks and those that occurred or were planned to occur in other countries is that the U.S. plots aspired to more military targets while the non-U.S. plots more frequently aimed for private citizens. It would be of interest for future research to break down the specific targets and methods planned by each individual country and to conduct inferential statistics in order to get a better understanding of whether different countries really do face different terrorist aspirations in their targets and tactics.

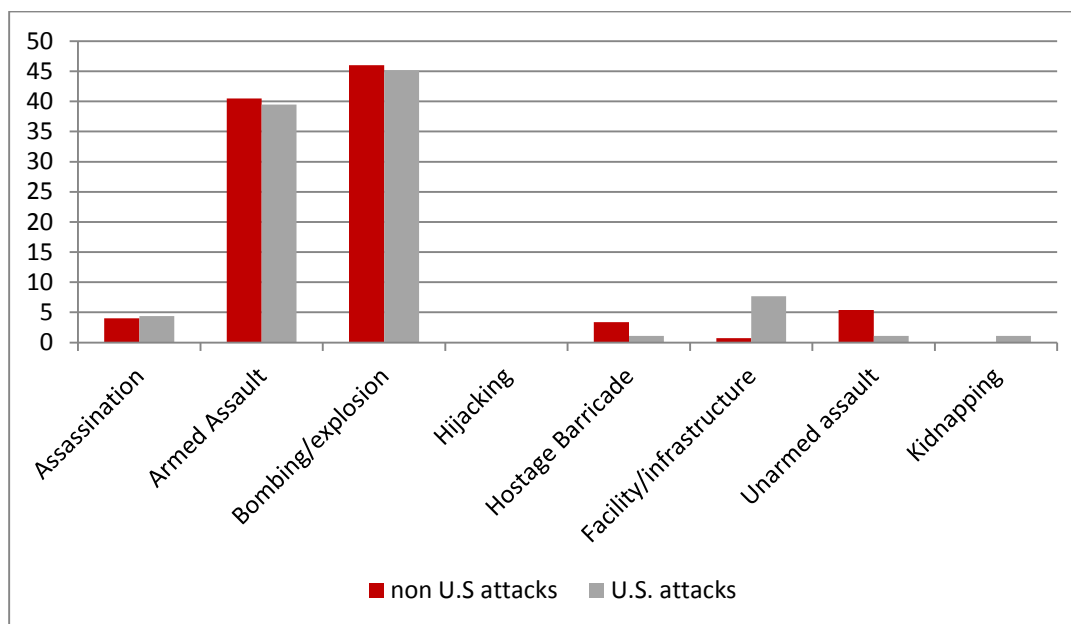
Mode of Attack

This analysis includes all of the cases, whether failed, foiled or successful, to show the full extent of the types of attack that are aspired to. In the period studied between 2010 and 2016 there were 199 cases where the mode of attack was known; 75 in the United States and 124 in the non-U.S. countries studied here. However, because each case may have more than one mode of attack (see earlier sections) there was a total of 91 separate attack modes for the U.S. cases and 148 for the non-U.S. sample. To allow comparability these were converted to percentages of the U.S. attacks and percentages of the non-U.S. attacks. The number and the percentage of each attack mode is shown in Table 6 and the percentages represented in Figure 12.

Table 6. The number and percentage of actual or planned attack modes for the Non U.S. and the U.S cases occurring between 2010 and 2016.

Attack Mode	Non-U.S.		U.S	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Assassination	6	4	4	4.4
Armed Assault	60	40.5	36	39.5
Bombing/explosion	68	46	41	45.1
Hijacking	0	0	0	0
Hostage Barricade	5	3.4	1	1.1
Facility/infrastructure	1	0.7	7	7.7
Unarmed assault	8	5.4	1	1.1
Kidnapping	0	0	1	1.1
TOTAL	148	100	91	100

Figure 12. Comparison of the percentage of attack mode types for the non-U.S. and the U.S. attacks or planned attacks.



As Table 6 and Figure 12 show, the proportion of all attack modes that are actually conducted or aspired to in the United States are remarkably similar to those that occur in allied countries, suggesting that the forms that terrorism will take are broadly the same in the United States as for the combined other countries. Future research could break this down by actual country to see whether, for example, the United Kingdom, France or Germany, experience different types of targeting to the United States. There are slightly more infrastructure attacks (or planned attacks) in the U.S. sample in this time period, and slightly more unarmed assaults in the other countries, but the difference is not large enough to draw any conclusions. The number of hostage taking incidents in general is low during this time period; however, this does not reflect the actual rate as many Western hostages are taken in countries outside of the countries selected for the current research.

Perpetrators

Attack team size: In order to determine whether there is any difference in the attack team size for U.S. attacks as compared to those occurring in the other countries we are studying, the data were analyzed using an independent sample t-test. Here we include all of the cases, including those that completely failed. We had no basis for predicting a difference between team size and the location of the actual or planned attack, and so a two-tailed test of statistical significance is appropriate. The analysis revealed that the mean number of perpetrators (where both the number of perpetrators and the intended target location were known) for the 73 U.S. attacks between 2010 and 2016 was 1.26 (SD=0.53), while the mean number of perpetrators in the 125 non-U.S. attacks was 2.58 (SD=2.59). This is a mean difference of 1.32. This difference is statistically significant ($t=4.3$, $df=196$, $p<0.001$). Therefore we can conclude that there are

larger team sizes found in attacks and planned attacks outside the United States than for those occurring on U.S. soil. Future research could try to ascertain the reasons for the difference.

Organizational Affiliation: Of the total sample of cases³³ recorded between 2010 and 2016, the majority (n=195) could be coded as to whether they had a credible link to a terrorist organization. The number of cases linked and not linked for both the U.S. and the non-U.S. data are shown in Table 7.

Table 7. The number of cases in the non-U.S. and U.S. samples that were linked to a terrorist organization (2010-2016).

Linked to Terrorist Organization	Non-U.S. Cases	U.S. Cases	Total
No	63	64	127
Yes	58	10	68
Total	121	74	195

Table 7 shows that only 10 of the 74 U.S. cases in this sample were found to have a credible link to a terrorist organization (13.5%). In comparison, for the non-U.S. cases in the same time period, 58 out of 121 cases (47.9%) were considered to be linked to a known terrorist organization. This is a statistically significant difference ($X^2=23.95$, $df=1$, $p<0.001$).

It was noted earlier in the report that fewer cases are claimed by a terrorist organization than are credibly linked to them, and some that are not credibly linked to an organization are nonetheless claimed. It may be hypothesized that claims relate more to the propaganda potential of the attack than whether there were any genuine contacts between the operatives. It would be of interest for future research to identify what distinguishes those cases that are claimed as compared to those that are not.

Table 8 shows the number of cases that were claimed in the U.S. and non-U.S. samples for comparison.

Table 8. The number of cases in the non U.S. and U.S. samples that were claimed by a terrorist organization (2010-2016).

Claimed by a Terrorist Organization	Non-U.S. Cases	U.S. Cases	Total
No	117	69	186
Yes	11	6	68
Total	128	75	203

As Table 8 shows, very few cases are actually claimed by terrorist organizations, and the proportions are almost identical for the U.S. (8%) and the non-U.S. cases (8.6%). Chi-square analysis confirmed the difference to not be statistically significant ($X^2=0.02$, $df=1$, $p=0.88$).

³³ Failed attacks are included here as well.

Converts: The data on the perpetrators' religion and their parental heritage is very patchy for the non-U.S. data. Many reports, especially in Europe, do not mention these aspects at all, and therefore a lot of the data is recorded as missing. However, reports do sometimes mention when a perpetrator is a convert to Islam and, where we have this information, we can give an indication of the differences between the U.S. and the non-U.S. data for the time period sampled. In the non-U.S. data, 18 converts were recorded out of a total of 326 perpetrators (5.5%). In the U.S. data, 23 converts were recorded out of a total of 92 perpetrators (25%). The number of perpetrators is calculated based only on those cases where the number of conspirators is known. Future research could shed light on why there are apparently more converts among U.S. perpetrators.

Foreign Fighters and Training Abroad: As with the data on the perpetrators' religion, a large proportion of the data is coding as missing with respect to whether perpetrators had trained abroad or had fought in foreign conflicts, especially in the non-U.S. data set. Nonetheless, where this information is given in reports, we can give an indication of the differences between the U.S. and the non-U.S. cases for the time period studied. For the U.S. cases, regardless of whether they were coded as successful, failed or foiled, only one person was coded as having fought overseas - Abdirahman Sheik Mohamud, whose plan to attack a military base in Texas was foiled in 2015. He was also coded as having trained abroad along with one other individual involved in the U.S. attacks or planned attacks. During the same time period, 32 perpetrators were identified as having trained abroad in the non-U.S. plots (regardless of outcome) and 22 as having fought in foreign conflicts.

Even though the data here are unreliable, and given that there are more attacks and more significantly more perpetrators involved in the non-U.S. plots, the indication is that returned fighters and those that train abroad are more of a problem in allied countries than in the United States. Nevertheless, as a proportion of all perpetrators, these individuals remain a small minority of those that seek to conduct jihadist terrorist attacks. Anecdotal evidence from the reports suggests that a number of perpetrators turn to attacking on home soil when their plans to travel to a conflict zone are prevented, whether by circumstance or official intervention, and this is a significant area for continued research.³⁴

Lone Wolves: For the full time period we identified 17 perpetrators that we considered to be true lone wolves, and a further two who were potentially lone wolves. Of those cases, 14 appear in the 2010-2016 sample. For the non-U.S. data between 2010 and 2016 we identified 32 lone wolves and another three possible. The number of lone wolf attacks do seem to be increasing in recent years, with a further seven definite and two possible occurring in the non-U.S. countries studied in the first half of 2017.

³⁴ See Thomas Hegghammer, "Should I Stay or Should I Go? Explaining Variation in Western Jihadists' Choice between Domestic and Foreign Fighting," *American Political Science Review*, 107, 1 (February 2013), pp. 1-15.

Conclusions

In this report we have provided an overview of our data, along with our analytical framework, and set out the main findings on what can be learned about the U.S. targets, methods, perpetrators, and plot outcomes. We have compared U.S. foiled plots to those that were successful and considered the trends for the types of attacks that were attempted or completed in the United States compared to allied countries over a seven year period from 2010 to 2016. By considering failed and foiled plots as well as those that were successful, we reveal the perpetrators' intentions even when they were not successful in a material or kinetic sense.

Most U.S. perpetrators are young men who are American citizens or residents; few returned foreign fighters are among them, and there are few refugees. We find that true "lone wolves" are actually quite rare, but that they are more likely to be successful than perpetrators working in teams. Most are Muslims by birth from diverse immigrant backgrounds, but there is also a significant proportion of converts. The majority are not formally associated with a known extremist organization, although we note credible links between perpetrators and organizations as well as claims of responsibility by known groups. Many of the individuals in our dataset explained their motive as opposition to the American use of military force against Muslims in civil conflicts abroad. If there is a consistent theme it is an emotional one of punishment or revenge.

Non-U.S. attacks employ higher numbers of operatives than those in the United States. The methods chosen for carrying out an attack (e.g., armed assault, bombing, etc.) are almost identical when comparing the U.S. cases to the combined data for the other countries we sampled and are therefore likely to indicate trends in terrorist tactics regardless of geographic location.

Most U.S. plots are foiled, and most of those foiled plots involve government surveillance and/or government informants who enter the plot at an early stage. Surveillance is also the most frequent route to disruption outside the United States, although there are far fewer reported cases involving government informants and we do not see the sting operations overseas, whereby perpetrators complete their plans under disarmed and supervised conditions before arrest.

Thus, our data confirm that after an early period when al-Qa'ida was the major threat, the United States came to face a disaggregated "homegrown" threat from conspiracies composed mostly of small groups or individuals who were not agents of the organizations the United States and the West are fighting in Afghanistan or the Middle East or Africa, although the attackers or plotters may believe that they are members of such groups or may be inspired by the group's ideological appeals.

Future Research

The research team has identified a number of areas for important future research.

There appear to be some aspects of the U.S. attacks or plots and their perpetrators that make them distinctive from those happening in the allied countries examined. Future research is needed to better understand issues surrounding attack team membership, the numbers of U.S. converts identified and the role of thwarted attempts to travel to overseas conflicts in predicting future action at home.

Further comparative analysis is needed in order to understand whether the forms of attack and the targets selected are different to specific allied countries, rather than all other countries combined. The recent rise in vehicle attacks merits further research in its own right, as does the extent to which modes of attack are changing over time. In regard to early detection of terrorist plots, further research is needed into specific forms of surveillance, the role of tips offs, and the efficacy of general monitoring of suspicious online activity.

While we picked up few cases of plots that failed, a better understanding of “changes of heart” would help promote mechanisms that would encourage defection in the future. Anecdotal evidence suggests that visible policing of targets and family influences may play important roles in deterrence and prevention.

It was noted that fewer cases are claimed by Islamic State than are credibly linked to them, and some that are not credibly linked to them are nonetheless claimed. It may be hypothesized that claims relate more to the propaganda potential of the attack than whether there were any genuine contacts between the operatives. It would be of interest for future research to identify what distinguishes those cases that are claimed as compared to those that are not. It would also be of interest to compare attacks credibly linked to Islamic State to those credibly linked to AQAP. It would also be useful to identify the differences in the commission of these attacks in the United States and Europe, Australia, and New Zealand.

Studies of contagion are usually based on successful attacks – both as the triggering event and as the measure of recurrence. The data collected here can provide a more complete analysis of contagion by including failed and foiled attempts.

It is equally important to understand how terrorist actors respond to failure, in particular whether they continue their attempts until they are successful (or the perpetrators are apprehended) or change their tactics. This research could yield valuable insights into learning, adaptation, and innovation.

Finally, the dataset provides the potential for more accurate and refined “profiling” of different subgroups of perpetrators, the targets they choose, and their motivations for planning an attack.

In conclusion, we also wish to stress that the events that we are tracking are ongoing, and that as new plots and attacks occur our findings need to be adjusted accordingly. Datasets on terrorist plots need to be

dynamic rather than static. One of the important contributions of our study is that it enables us to interpret current events in light of historical trends.