

# **RESTRICTING THE UNIVERSAL ACCESS OF WEAPONS TO TERRORIST ORGANISATIONS**

*Helena Voorhuis and Isabel  
Mannion*

## **Introduction:**

Terrorism: the unlawful use of violence and intimidation against innocent civilians in the pursuit of political aims. It is a global issue that has come to light many times in the past due to the unpredictable amount of damage every terrorist attack inflicts on both a nation and its people. The best-known example of this is the September 11 attacks in the USA, or the various suicide bombings in Turkey. What enables the terrorists to spread fear and damage so easily is their access to weaponry, with which they murder thousands of innocent people. Terrorists use both manufactured and improvised weapons; popular types include biological, chemical, firearms and explosives. In order to stop terrorism, or at least diminish its effects, many different measures must be taken to stop the flow of weapons to terrorist groups.

## **Explanation of Key Terms:**

Counterterrorism: political or military activities designed to prevent or thwart terrorism.

Domestic terrorism: the committing of terrorist acts in the perpetrator's own country against their fellow citizens.

Ecoterrorism: violence carried out to further environmentalist ends, or alternatively the act of causing deliberate environmental damage in order to further political ends.

Militant: combative and aggressive in support of a political or social cause, and typically favouring extreme, violent, or confrontational methods.

Terrorism: the unlawful use of violence and intimidation, especially against civilians, in the pursuit of political aims.

Weapon: a small firearm designed or used for inflicting bodily harm or physical damage.

Chemical weapon: a specialized munition that uses chemicals formulated to inflict death or harm on humans.

Biological weapon: a disease-producing agent that releases pathogens such as bacteria, viruses, fungi, and any infectious agents or poisons.

Manufactured weapons: weapons that are made professionally by arms factories.

Improvised weapons: weapons that are manufactured by non-professional arms manufacturers, or by illicit workshops.

Explosive weapons: weapons that use explosive material that detonates to project a blast or fragmentation from a specific spot.

Illegal black market transfers: in this context, the purchase or selling of a weapon without a license or governmental consent; often in violation of national and/or international laws.

## Background Information:

Terrorists usually use conventional weapons that are easily obtainable and effective in inflicting harm. The weapons that are famously used by the largest terrorist groups like Boko Haram and ISIS are bombs, handguns and AK-47 rifles.

Among the former, car- and truck-bombs have earned a reputation of being very powerful, especially in suicide attacks. In these attacks, a terrorist drives into a large crowd of civilians before setting off an explosion that kills both the people around the vehicle and the terrorist themselves.

Terrorists use both *improvised* and *manufactured* bombs.

*Improvised bombs* are the most commonly used, as the materials used to create them are everyday items that have no relation to weapons, and are therefore much easier to obtain without suspicion.

Powerful explosive or incendiary bombs can be made from common consumer goods such as pool sanitizers, fertilizers, and paint removers. A famous improvised incendiary bomb is the Molotov cocktail, which some refer to as “poor man’s grenade”. It is highly flammable, being a glass bottle filled with petrol and gasoline. This is set alight and thrown at the intended targets, at which point the bottle smashes, setting the surroundings on fire.

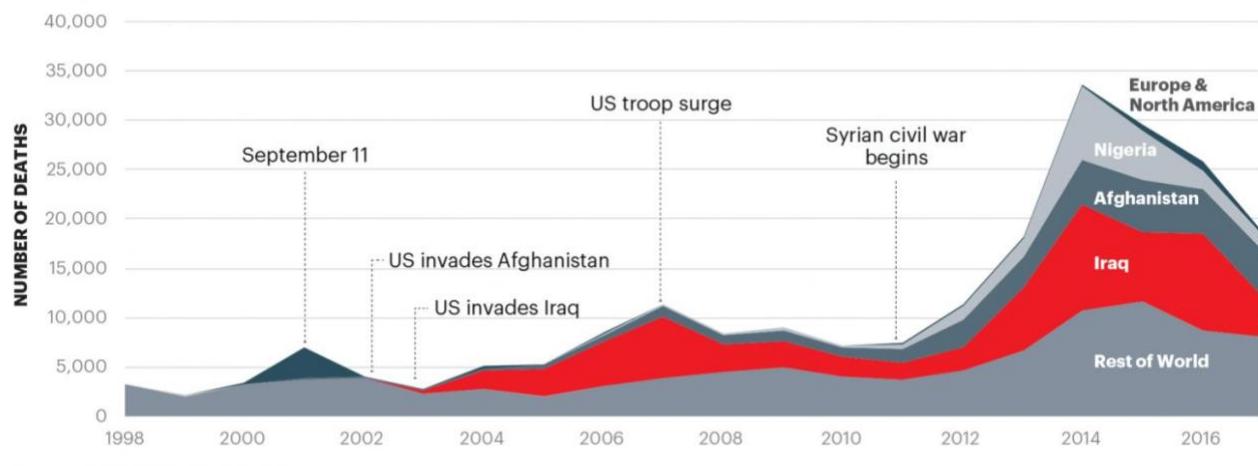
The use of larger more sophisticated weapons such as missiles are rare, but a few groups are known to be in possession of surface-to-air missiles that can bring down helicopters, fighter aircraft and civilian airliners. These can prove very dangerous, as commercial airlines contain many civilians, making them ideal targets for groups armed with these missiles.

Due to different rules and regulations on the purchasing of firearms in countries, guns and rifles end up being bought by terrorists through illegal black market transfers or at gun shows in countries with lenient laws, such as the US. Those weapons can then be transferred and used all around the world in terrorist attacks. Their lethality and relative ease of use make them extremely dangerous, and they are the primary weapon of combatant terrorists. The recent rise in the popularity of Bitcoin has also made it easier for terrorists to purchase weapons in massive amounts as the people who purchase, sell or use bitcoin can remain anonymous.

All the loopholes mentioned above are examples of how terrorists can easily gain access to firearms, weapons and explosives without being traced, stopped or arrested.

## Major Players Involved:

In 2018, 18,814 lives were taken by terrorists globally. Most deaths are caused by the four main terrorist groups: the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria/Levant (ISIS/ISIL; an jihadist group based in Syria and Iraq), the Taliban (a military organization from Afghanistan), Al-Shabaab (an Islamic insurgent group based in Somalia) and Boko Haram (Nigeria's militant Islamist group; fighting to throw over the government in order to create an Islamic state). The actions committed by the groups lead to instability and danger in many countries including Afghanistan, Iraq, Nigeria, Somalia and Syria.<sup>1</sup>



Source: START GTD, IEP Calculations

*IEP's graph, which displays the number of deaths inflicted by terrorist groups over time. (More details on some events can be found in the timeline.)*

---

<sup>1</sup><https://www.forbes.com/sites/dominicdudley/2018/12/05/deadliest-terrorist-groups-in-the-world/#222b466b2b3e>

Afghanistan: this country has become the “world’s deadliest country for terrorism” in 2017 according to Alastair Jamieson from NBC news.<sup>2</sup> It has been reported by the Global Terrorism Index that 25% of worldwide terrorism-related deaths occurred in Afghanistan. In 2018, however, Iraq was ranked number 1 out of 163 nations due to the high amount of incidents, fatalities, injuries and property damage. Luckily, the total number of deaths caused by terrorism decreased by 27% in 2017, with the largest decrease being in Iraq and Syria due to the ISIS’ decline.<sup>3</sup> However, there are still numerous terrorist groups other than ISIS in Syria, such as Jaysh al-Islam and Hayat al-Tahrir al-Sham, which have been responsible for 303 deaths.

The Nigerian terrorist group Boko Haram: this group has also inflicted lots of harm within their country. In 2017 Boko Haram had caused 1254 deaths. They have spread to nearby countries, including Chad, Cameroon and Niger. Thankfully, the amount of deaths per year in Nigeria has decreased by 83% since 2014, which is the result of an increase in security forces and counterterrorism. The arrests of Boko Haram leaders have lead to outrage from their supporters, who continue to strike against the government and innocents alike.

Al-Shabaab, Somalia: this extremist militant group is an affiliate to Al-Qaeda (the terror network that was responsible for the 9/11 attacks) is based in Somalia, and inflicted 1457 deaths in 2017, which was an increase of 93% from the previous year. In October 2017 there were 588 deaths and 316 injured in Hodan, a region within Somali’s capital Mogadishu. As mentioned before, terrorist groups have not been as active as they were in 2014, which was the peak. However, Somalia is an exception to this trend due to the continuing attacks of Al-Shabaab, with about 6000 deaths since 2001.

The United States of America: the US ranks at number one in the export of weapons worldwide. The country accounts for 34% of all exports and has increased its sales by 25% since 2008. Its largest client is Saudi Arabia, which is a controversial transaction due to the war with Yemen. Another large client of the US is the UAE. Both of the countries are situated in the Middle East, which is still host to multiple terrorist groups. By selling weapons to these areas, the USA may be supplying the very terrorists they fight with their weaponry.

---

<sup>2</sup><https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/afghanistan-becomes-world-s-deadliest-country-terrorism-overtaking-iraq-n942086>

<sup>3</sup><http://visionofhumanity.org/indexes/terrorism-index/>

Russia: this country is the second-largest exporter of weaponry in the world, as it accounts for 22% of all exports. Russia has sold weapons to a large variety of countries; between 2013 and 2018 it is estimated that they exported to approximately 47 different countries. Their main trade partners are India, China and Vietnam.

## State Sponsors of Terrorism

The list below lists all the countries that have been determined by the United States as countries that support terrorism.

The US states that these countries "repeatedly provided support for acts of international terrorism".

Iran: Iran has increased its presence in Africa and has attempted to smuggle arms to Houthi separatists in Yemen and to Shia oppositionists in Bahrain.

Sudan: Sudanese officials have participated in terrorist attacks in the past, and Sudan has previously facilitated terrorist activity by assisting them in acquiring weapons.

Syria: the Assad regime has continuously made efforts to help terrorism by providing political and weapon support to Hezbollah, a Lebanese militia backed by Iran, who support the Assad regime.

DPRK: North Korea has previously sold weapons to terrorist groups; it is also responsible for the Rangoon bombing and the bombing of Korean Air Flight 858.

## Timeline of Events:

Terrorist attacks can happen at a very large scale depending on the location and the amount of weaponry. They also affect many people's lives. Here are some of the worst terrorist attacks in history and the weapons used<sup>4</sup>:

### 1985 - Air India Flight 182

The Air India flight was a plane flying from Toronto, Canada to Delhi, India through London and Montreal. During the flight, a bomb exploded mid-air, obliterating the aircraft in the Atlantic Ocean (Irish airspace). There were 329 passengers killed, including Canadian, Indian and British citizens. It is the largest mass murder in Canadian history.

### 2001 - The Twin Towers Attack

On September 11, 2001, there were four organized terrorist attacks by Al-Qaeda, a global terror network established by Osama Bin Laden. Four commercial aeroplanes were hijacked by terrorists; two collided with the World Trade Center, one was crashed into the Pentagon, and the fourth was retaken by passengers and crashed in a field. In total there were an estimated 2996 casualties and more than 6000 injured.

### 2008: Christmas Massacre

From the 24th to the 27th of December, 2008, a Ugandan rebel group, Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), attacked villages in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It started with a military operation led by the Ugandan army with the help of the Congolese, Southern Sudanese and Central African Republic armies. They attacked the LRA's main headquarters near the border of Sudan. As an act of retaliation, the LRA divided into groups and slaughtered many civilians by crushing skulls with axes, machetes, and wooden bats, and hung many using cords. At night they set fire to about 940 homes, churches and schools. They chose December because they knew that people would be in large groups during the Christmas festivities. The LRA killed at least 620 people and abducted over 160 children.<sup>5</sup>

### 2014: Gamboru Ngala attack

On May 5th and 6th, 2014, 336 people were killed by the Boko Haram militia in Gamboru and Ngala, Nigeria. The attack lasted 12 hours and the surviving inhabitants fled to Cameroon, the neighbouring country. At night the group abducted 8 girls and set fire to the town.

---

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/worst-terrorist-attacks-in-history.html>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/news/2009/01/17/dr-congo-lra-slaughters-620-christmas-massacres>

### 2014: Camp Speicher Massacre

On 12 June 2014 ISIS killed an estimated 1935<sup>6</sup> army recruits in an old palace belonging to Saddam Hussein, the previous president of Iraq, right after the unforeseen capture of Mosul. The attack was seen as an act of revenge for the execution of Saddam, and the fact that his regime no longer stood.

### 2015: Ankara Suicide Bombings

On 10th October, 2015, 103 people were killed and 250 wounded when two suicide bombers targeted a peace rally in Ankara, Turkey. The peace rally was held in order to stop the violence between the Turkish authorities and the main rebel group, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The Ankara suicide bombing is the deadliest attack in Turkey's history and two Isis cell members were discovered to be attackers.<sup>7</sup>

## Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

In 2004, the Security Council adopted resolution 1540. This establishes binding obligations for all States regarding the non-proliferation of weapons. It is aimed at preventing the proliferation of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, monitoring their means of delivery, and deterring non-State actors (terrorists) from accessing such items. Additionally, it declares that States must refrain from providing any form of support to non-State actors that attempt to develop, acquire, manufacture, possess, transport, transfer or use nuclear, chemical or biological weapons and their means of delivery. It mostly focuses on weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), and its main benefit is the fact that it is a global mandate, binding everywhere, unlike previous nonproliferation treaties and conventions. As such, all members of the United Nations must abide by it.

## Methods of Solving the Issue

1. Implementing the ability to take legal action against those who supply terrorist organizations with firearms, ensuring that the number of illegal firearm stockpiles diminishes, making it harder for said organizations to obtain weapons and firearms consistently.
2. Creating means of tracking and tracing firearms worldwide, in order to determine whose control they are under.

---

<sup>6</sup><https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/camp-speicher-massacre-isis-islamic-state-tikrit-air-academy-iraq-a8040576.html>

<sup>7</sup><https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/a-timeline-of-bomb-attacks-in-turkey-between-2015-2016-a6879841.html>

## References:

<https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/worst-terrorist-attacks-in-history.html>

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/a-timeline-of-bomb-attacks-in-turkey-between-2015-2016-a6879841.html>

[https://www.unodc.org/images/odccp/terrorism\\_weapons\\_conventional.html](https://www.unodc.org/images/odccp/terrorism_weapons_conventional.html)

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2009/01/17/dr-congo-ira-slaughters-620-christmas-massacres>

<https://www.google.rw/amp/s/www.forbes.com/sites/nikitamalik/2019/01/15/how-the-darknet-can-be-used-by-terrorists-to-obtain-weapons/amp/>

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/camp-speicher-massacre-isis-islamic-state-tikrit-air-academy-iraq-a8040576.html>

<http://visionofhumanity.org/indexes/terrorism-index/>

<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/afghanistan-becomes-world-s-deadliest-country-terrorism-overtaking-iraq-n942086>

<https://fas.org/asmp/campaigns/smallarms/IssueBrief3ArmsTrafficking.html>

<https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/worst-terrorist-attacks-in-history.html>