

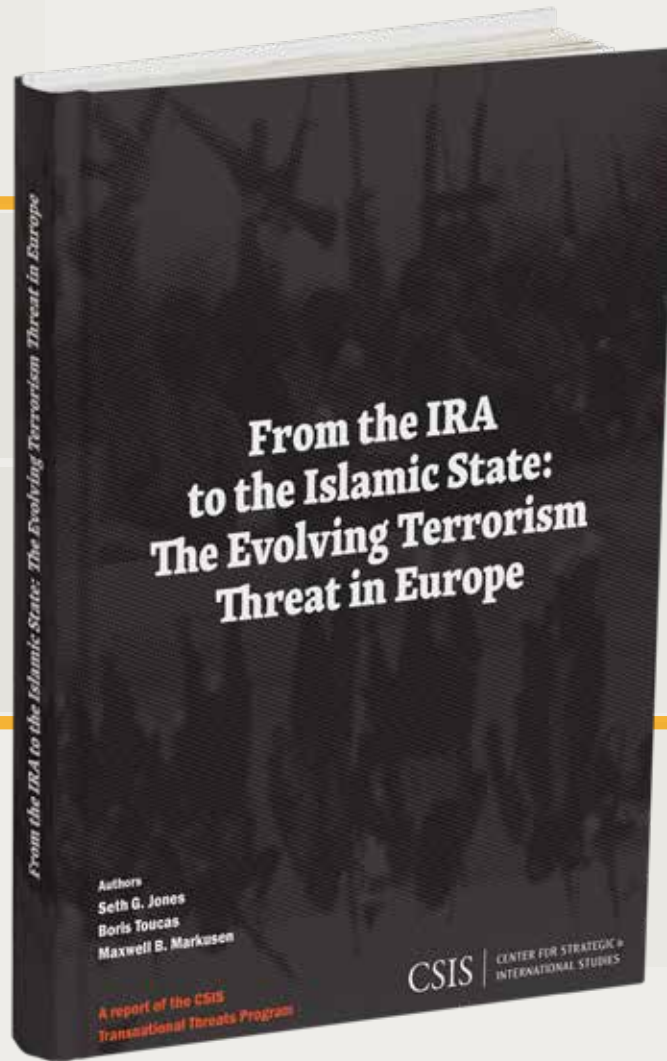


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ISLAMIC MILITARY COUNTER TERRORISM COALITION

General Directorate of Planning and Coordination

# Book Review 8

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## From the IRA to the Islamic State: The Evolving Terrorism Threat in Europe

Authors: Seth Jones, Boris Toucas & Maxwell Markusen





**From the IRA to the Islamic State:  
The Evolving Terrorism Threat in Europe**

Authors: Seth Jones, Boris Toucas & Maxwell Markusen

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As a point of valid comparison, Europe's challenges with terrorism have largely gone unnoticed in the United States (US), whose strategy documents like the U.S. Department of Defense's National Defense Strategy have shifted away from counterterrorism and headed towards competition with other states, such as China, Russia, Iran and North Korea. Remarkably enough, Europe's approach to terrorists that has been increasingly becoming tougher and more aggressive—including prosecuting individuals involved in planning to travel abroad to join terrorist groups and engage in associated activities, while censoring extremist internet material. This also includes punishing internet companies that do not comply with the regulations that explicitly state removing extremist material. Improving intelligence cooperation also gains more prominence. All such key issues have largely gone unnoticed in the US.

Conspicuously, the current threat in Europe carry and portend several implications for the US, which can be well summarized in the following points:

**First:** The terrorism threat, be it existing or potential, in Europe should grant Americans

a pause for reflection and review. The threat of attacks constituted by certain groups such Daesh and Al-Qaeda to U.S. allies like the United Kingdom (UK) and France is at one of the highest levels since the 911/ attacks in 2001. Furthermore, the number of active terrorist fighters and groups all over the globe

The terrorist threat in Europe should give Americans a pause for reflection. Again, the global threat remains substantial, which consequently well explains that the recent dearth of successful global attacks against the US, at home or abroad, may be temporary.

are both at near-peak levels since 1980. This simply indicates that the global threat remains glaringly substantial. As such, the recent dearth of successful attacks carried out against the US, be it at home or abroad, which are orchestrated and engineered by groups like Daesh and Al-Qaeda, may be short-lived; that is, temporary.

**Second:** It is critically important to note that disengagement programs will face challenges relating to implementation and measurement.

It is also important to bring to focus the fact that several European governments no longer use certain terms. For example, some European countries have shifted away from using the term DERADICALIZATION, which requires creating an overall change to an individual's mindset and ideological beliefs, gradually including terms such as disengagement, which again involves dissuading an individual from carrying out violent or other illegal activity. US policymakers should therefore consider a similar switch or shift, and, instead, focus on helping disengage individuals from violence and other illicit behavior. It should be noted that the US does lack a systematic disengagement strategy and should, therefore, look to European governments for lessons in this regard.

**Third:** Well, the prominence and rise of violent right-wing networks across Europe should send out a warning to the US. The UK, for instance, experienced right-wing threats, such as the Finsbury Park Mosque Attack carried out in June, 2017. Later in 2018, 10 suspected far-right extremists were arrested by the French authorities. The arrestees included one retired police officer and one retired soldier on a charge of an alleged plot to attack Muslims. It can be understood that the terrorism threat posed by violent right-wing extremists in the US also seems to be rising up. This simply means that the number of terrorist attacks carried out by far-right perpetrators in the US went up higher than the past decade, and even quadrupled between 2016 and 2017. Likewise, right-wing extremists in the US and Europe have also used the Internet and social media to broaden their presence, spread publicity and coordinate their actions more efficiently. In the US, the white supremacists and anti-government extremists are of continued concern. They include militia groups and sovereign citizens, that have plotted attacks against government, law enforcement agencies, racial, and religious targets. Violent leftist groups, furthermore, constitute a threat, even though far-right groups seem to be of better armaments and larger size than they are.

Europe has not experienced a significant problem of refugees or asylum-seekers related to terrorism, and less than 0.0003% of refugees coming to the US posed a terrorist threat. However, refugees and asylum seekers in Europe and the US have been severely threatened.

**Fourth:** In spite of the anti-immigration rhetoric embraced and espoused by right-wing extremists, Europe has not experienced a key problem with extremism from newly-arrived refugees or asylum seekers. Most terrorist plots and attacks in Europe have been carried out by citizens of European countries. Similarly, in the US, the number of terrorist refugees or asylum seekers has been negligible or infinitesimal. Between the period of 2002 and 2015, less than 0.0003% of new refugees flooding into the US, which is a statistically insignificant number, constituted a terrorism threat. Historically, refugees have played and will continue to play a seriously crucial role in ensuring economic prosperity and cultural diversity for the US. Furthermore, the threat to the American homeland brought about by settled refugees has been low. Practically, none of the refugees have been involved in the key terrorist plots since the 9/11 attacks. Nevertheless, the threat from refugees and asylum seekers has been heavily overstated in both Europe and the US.

In light of these developments, the Report poses key questions:

- ▶ What is the nature of the terrorism threat to Europe?
- ▶ How has it evolved over the course of time?
- ▶ How was the response of the European governments?
- ▶ What are the implications for the US?

To provide answers to these questions, the authors of the Report utilize a combination of qualitative and quantitative information. They

first culled, compiled and analyzed hundreds of documents, including writings, statements, and internal memoranda of Daesh, Al-Qaeda, and other terrorist organizations. They also screened key documents for many European governments and EU bodies. For the purpose of culling quantitative data, the Report Team collected information from multiple sources, such as the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol), Global Terrorism Database at the University of Maryland, Jane’s Terrorism and Insurgency Centre, and other sources. Furthermore, for qualitative data, the working team interviewed dozens of subject matter experts and several government officials from Germany, Belgium, Spain, the Netherlands, Poland, and other European countries.

Daesh in 2014, with the number of failed, bungled, thwarted, foiled, and completed attacks in Europe doubling more and more from 2016 to 2017; however, it declined in 2018 perhaps because of the Daesh loss of territory in Iraq and Syria, driven by effective Western targeting of Daesh and Al-Qaeda.

- ▶ There has been an increase in extreme right-wing violence, at about 43% from 2016 to 2017. Several countries, including the UK, Germany, Czech Republic, Belgium, and Portugal, have dealt with violent right-wing groups and individuals.
- ▶ There has been a shift from complex attacks, such as the 2004 Madrid and 2005 London attacks, towards simple ones, where cells and individuals used vehicles and knives that generally do not kill as many people as complex attacks and bombings do.

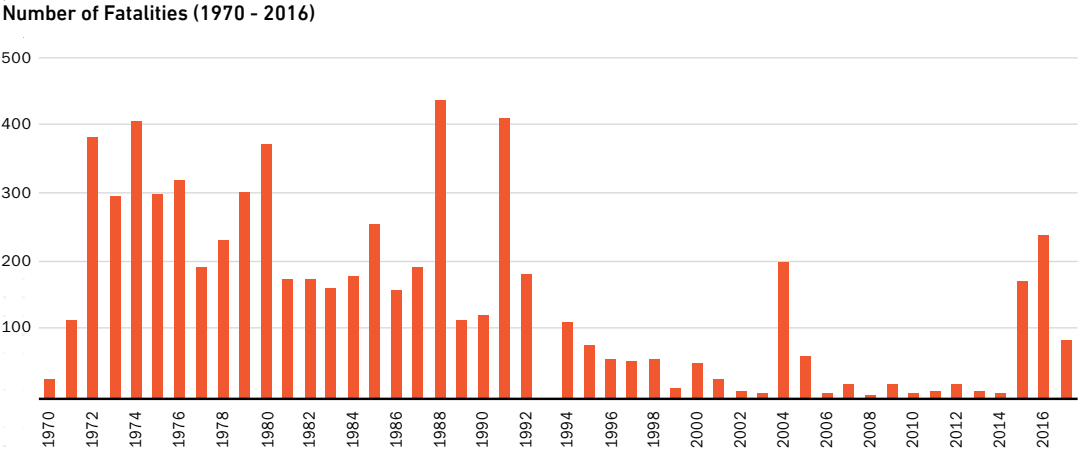
## Terrorism Trend in Europe

The Report looks at historical trends, including the terrorist threat and shift in attacks from groups like the IRA and the Basque separatist organization Euskadi ta Askatasuna (ETA) to attacks carried out by newer terrorist groups and attacks by extreme right-wing and tactics like weapon types and targets in Europe. The Report highlights several revealing findings, including:

- ▶ There was a remarkable increase in the so-called jihadist activity following the rise of

## Historical Trends

The number of fatalities caused by terrorist attacks in Europe has declined somewhat since the end of the Cold War. In the same vein, Europe has experienced a spate of terrorist attacks during the Cold War from ethno-nationalist groups, such as the IRA and ETA. European governments also had to address extreme left-wing groups like the Italian Brigade Rosse (Red Brigades).



Source: From the IRA to the Islamic State: The Evolving Terrorism Threat in Europe

Furthermore, terrorist groups attacked European and non-European targets. For instance, the June 1985 EgyptAir Flight 648 bombing carried out by Abu Nidal Organization killed 60 people. Later in December 1985, Abu Nidal Organization carried out Rome and Vienna airport attacks, killing 23 people. Moreover, the December 1988 bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 killed 270 people; the attack was perpetrated by a network affiliated with the Libyan government. Furthermore, the 1995 bombings in Paris, killed 8 and wounded 157 others by the so-called Armed Islamic Group (GIA).

Despite the spread of terrorist activities in Europe during the 1970s and 1980s, mass casualty attacks were sporadic and rare. In the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union in the beginning of the 1990s, which served as an ideological inspiration for numerous left-wing groups, and the 1998 Good Friday peace agreement in Northern Ireland, the number of fatalities from terrorism in Europe began to significantly decrease by the mid-1990s.

Following the 9/11 attacks, 2001 in the US, the number of fatalities in Europe increased due to two major attacks: one of which was the Madrid attack on 11 March 2004, which claimed 191 lives and injured 1,755 individuals; it is the largest number of casualties in Europe since World War II. The second major attack was carried in London on July 7, 2005, claiming 56 lives, including the four suicide bombers, while injuring more than 700 individuals. The coordinated attack was conducted even though British intelligence warned of an imminent attack in April 2003.

The Joint Intelligence Committee specifically identified the London Underground as a potential target. A report published in May 2005 by the Joint Intelligence Analysis Center (JTAC) of the British Intelligence Service (MI5), which is responsible for assessing terrorist threats, concluded that

“the Al-Qaeda threat is not yet over, and that the events in Iraq act as a catalyst for a spate of terrorist activities in the UK.”. MI5 warned that “the most serious threat to the UK and British interests abroad comes from Al-Qaeda and its associated and affiliated networks.

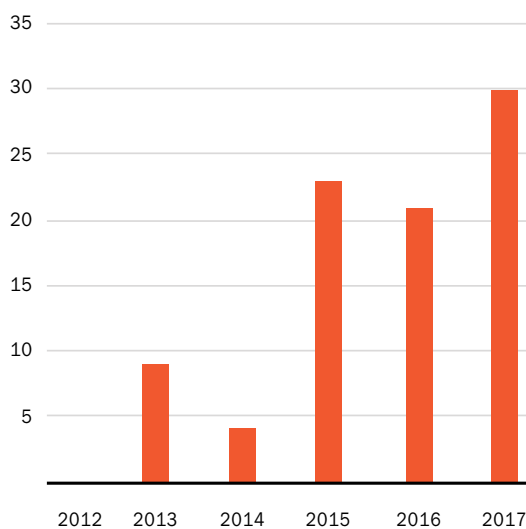
## The Rise of Daesh

Admittedly, the emergence of Daesh in 2014 presented Europe with another dangerous stage of terrorism. After overrunning Mosul, Daesh focused its strategic goals on further expanding its control of territory and plotting and inspiring attacks in the West. Furthermore, there were approximately 5,000 individuals from European Union countries, particularly Belgium, Germany, France, and the UK, who traveled to Iraq and Syria to support armed groups, with as many as 1,500 returning to Europe. It has become no secret that the number of failed, thwarted, bungled, foiled and completed terrorist attacks in Europe recorded an increase from 2 in 2014 to 17 in 2015, 13 in 2016, and 33 in 2017. For instance, the January 2015 attacks were carried out against the satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo and other targets in Paris, France. Other terrorist attacks also include the November 2015 attacks perpetrated against the Bataclan theater and other targets in Paris. Attacks were also plotted and carried out elsewhere such as those at the Brussels Airport and Maalbeek Metro Station in Brussels, Belgium, March 2016. More attacks were also carried out such as the July 2016 attack in Nice, France and the December 2016 attack at a Christmas market in Berlin, Germany. In 2017, the number of attacks doubled in comparison with the previous year. The geographical distribution of attacks has also risen up in European countries, such as the UK, France, Germany, Spain, Belgium, Sweden, Denmark and Finland, among others.

## Rise of Right-Wing Extremism

Europe experiences a threat posed by extreme-right groups. The number of attacks reportedly rose from 9 in 2013 to 21 in 2016 and 30 in 2017. Notoriously, the 2017 trajectory reveals that it faced the largest number of right-wing attacks in Europe since 1994. Admittedly, everyone is not aware of a single EU member state that is not affected in some way by right-wing violent extremism.

### Extreme Right-Wing Attacks in Europe (2012 - 2017)



Source: From the IRA to the Islamic State: The Evolving Terrorism Threat in Europe

Violent right-wing groups are widespread in many European countries, such as the (Identitäre Bewegung Deutschland) IBD factions; supporters of the Reich Citizen ideology in Germany; Britain First in Britain; the Generation of Identity Movement; Pro-Vlast in the Czech Republic; Soldiers of Odin in Belgium; Blood & Honor in Portugal.

Right-wing extremists carried out sophisticated and brutal attacks. In 2011, 77 people were killed in a series of attacks plotted and carried out by a right-wing extremist in Oslo and Utoya Island.

Europe also experiences a threat from extreme left-wing and ethno-nationalist groups, such as

Informal Anarchist Federation (IAF), International Revolutionary Front (IRF), Revolutionary Self-Defence Organization (RSDO), and Group of Popular Fighters (GPF). Europe also faces a threat from left-wing terrorism and extreme nationalist ethnic groups, such as the IAF and the IRF, and most left-wing terrorism in Europe is concentrated in Greece, Italy and Spain.

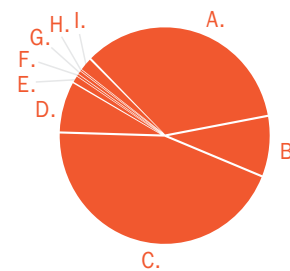
## Tactics and Targets

Terrorist tactics have also developed and simple attacks have become popular among terrorists in Europe. Such simple attacks used melee weapons most often carried or tucked in hand-to-hand combat, such as knives, swords, or axes), incendiary devices, and firearms. More savagely, vehicles were used as a weapon by extremists in 11% of attacks in 2017.

Such simple attacks do not kill large numbers of people albeit increasingly common. Brutally, terrorists used vehicles against civilians in many attacks. However, the July 2016 attack carried out in Nice was an exception; 87 people were killed as it involved a 19-ton rental truck plowing into a large gathering of civilians at a Bastille Day celebration. On the flip side, sophisticated attacks involve multiple terrorists armed with improvised explosive devices (IED) and guns, making it more likely to be more fatal. For example, 56 people were killed in the July 2005 attack carried out in London, and 130

### Number of Terrorist Attacks in the Eu

A. Explosives	393
B. Firearms	103
C. Incendiary	504
D. Melee	88
E. Vehicle	14
F. Chemical	3
G. Other	5
H. Sabotage Equipment	2
I. Unknown	25



Source: From the IRA to the Islamic State: The Evolving Terrorism Threat in Europe



people were also killed in the November 2015 attack in Paris.

## European Counterterrorism Responses

European governments have adopted a sharp and proactive policy in targeting terrorists and their recruitment methods over the recent years. Part of the challenge for governments is to address the methods by which individuals can access terrorist propaganda and narratives on the internet. When western technology companies cracked or clamped down on the channels, chat rooms and messaging channels of terrorist organizations, terrorists have switched to other platforms. Hence, it may be difficult for European counterterrorism authorities to penetrate such networks.

The European experience confirms that the internet and social media are likely to remain a major tool for extremist recruitment, fund-raising and other terrorist activities. The ease of accessing information over the internet is particularly worrisome and troublesome because it ushered in faster extremism than ever before. Terrorists will be able to take advantage of developments in commercial communication technologies. Others have switched to the dark web.

Well, the development of commercial technology and the deployment of online and social media platforms will necessarily require Western governments to constantly train government employees, hire experts from technology companies and academia, update laws, and work with the private sector. Likewise, companies that cannot effectively remove content that supports terrorism should be held accountable through legal means.

European governments, France and the UK in particular, have gone tough in combating extremist ideology, and have exercised great

pressure on social media companies to remove content that promotes or supports terrorism or violent extremism, including content that violates corporate service conditions.

Furthermore, European governments have stepped up and bolstered efforts to counter terrorism, surveillance and intelligence gathering in particular, and tackle extremist clerics more strictly. In this regard, a European Parliament special committee recommended that member countries take such actions as closing without delay mosques and places of worship and banning associations that do not obey and adhere to EU values and incite to terrorist and violent offences; banning and removing all religious literature within their territory that in one way or another incite to violent and terrorist acts, hatred, discrimination and violence; asking for such literature to be removed from online platforms and shops; and acting against satellite TV channels propagating hate speech. Accordingly, censorship of extremist material on the internet is now common and has greatly reduced the ubiquity of propaganda to terrorist groups. To this end, the new EU law imposes fines on internet companies that fail to comply with such regulations, such as removing extremist material within 60 minutes of publication. 29 European countries have also focused on programs of de-radicalization and disengagement at home. The number of arrests rose substantially, which again confirms the increasingly growing threat and success of intelligence.

## Receding Interest in Counterterrorism in the US Strategies

Despite the challenges posed by violent extremism and terrorism, counterterrorism has taken a back seat in the hierarchy of US national security interests for a set of reasons:

**First:** There has been a relative reduction in the number of terrorist attacks in the US compared to the levels in Europe. For example, since January 2017, there has been only one grave terrorist attack carried out by an extremist influenced by Daesh propaganda in the US. In a similar vein, on October 31, 2017, Sayfullo Saipov, rammed his own car into pedestrians along the Hudson River in New York City, killing 8 people while injuring a dozen more. In addition to thwarting and foiling a spate of terrorist plots.

**Second:** Some US government officials believe that IS has been annihilated and obliterated following the substantial loss of the territory it once controlled in Iraq and Syria.

**Third:** US leaders shifted their close focus from counterterrorism against non-state actors to focusing on influence and competing with countries such as China, Russia, Iran and North Korea. The Pentagon's National Defense Strategy also indicates that the main concern of US national security has become strategic competition among countries, while terrorism has taken a back seat. The threat from terrorist groups remains substantial in Europe. As Andrew Parker, director-general of the Security Service (MI5), noted "Europe encounters an intense, relentless and multidimensional international terrorist threat. Daesh continues to constitute the gravest threat, but Al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups haven't gone away or vanished. The terrorist threat to Europe is likely

to remain rampant in the foreseeable future, as European countries encounter a threat from extremist individuals, including the families of foreign fighters, individuals released from prison and those who convert to online violence".

**Finally,** there is a long history of counterterrorism cooperation between the US and Europe that needs to be sustained and maintained. For example, the US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and MI5 have long cooperated against the IRA to limit fundraising and other activities in the US, and intelligence agencies as well as enforcement agencies in Europe and the United States continued to cooperate after the Cold War.

Inasmuch as the US military is considering shifting its priorities from counterterrorism to state competition, Washington's withdrawal of troops from the Middle East, South Asia and Africa, its abilities will be reduced to conduct counterterrorism operations regionally. Therefore, Washington will need to increasingly work with allies to make up for it by gathering intelligence, building the capacity of local partners. European countries are the most reliable and efficient US allies, and countering effectively a spate of diverse terrorist networks in regions such as Europe, Africa, the Middle East and Asia will not pay off without close international cooperation; US-European counterterrorism cooperation is increasingly becoming more significant than ever.

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