

# ACTIVE THREAT INTELLIGENCE DIGEST

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Welcome to Kiernan Group Holdings' (KGH) *Active Threat Intelligence Digest*. This monthly newsletter covers topics of interest regarding elements of the active threat phenomenon: **active shooter incidents**, **workplace violence**, **insider threats**, and **terrorism**, with a focus on planning and prevention.



Law enforcement responds to a vehicle attack and stabbing at Ohio State University in November 2016.

Source: Paul Vernon /AFP/Getty Images

## "Lone Wolf" Terrorism and Simplified Tactics Threaten Soft Targets

By Dr. Tom Hunter

Terrorism, one of the four dimensions of "active threat," is an ever-evolving and ongoing threat to public and private sector safety and security. In recent years, autonomous, individual terrorists (known commonly as "lone wolves") have adapted their attack methods to focus on soft targets and the use of simpler, more readily available means to perpetrate violence. The use of vehicles as primary weapons, for example, in lieu of vehicles containing explosive devices, has proven an effective and lethal tactic that exploits natural vulnerabilities in crowded public spaces, both open (outdoor gatherings, public walkways, etc.) and confined (offices, clubs, restaurants, etc.).



Four Dimensions of Active Threat

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In addition, the use of knives, instead of firearms, has demonstrated terrorist adaptation to avoid the potential for detection prior to an attack and to increase the likelihood of a successful, lethal attack.

These adaptations have been promoted by ISIS and other terrorist groups, largely via social media, news releases, and online magazines. Al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula in 2010 encouraged its followers to use trucks as weapons in posts in its online magazine, *Inspire*.



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*"It is a simple idea and there is not much involved in its preparation."*

Article in *ISIS' Inspire Magazine*, 2010, touting using vehicles as weapons

The ease of use of simplified tactics and the online encouragement have combined to produce a wave of "low risk, high reward" attacks resulting in hundreds of casualties using means readily available to virtually any resident of any society – an adaption that is likely to continue to evolve and target Western nations for the foreseeable future.

### Lone Wolf Attacks Hard To Disrupt

Unlike terrorist cells that rely on various forms of communication and networking, lone wolf terrorists operate on their own, usually without signaling their intentions—thus challenging intelligence and law enforcement agencies to disrupt potential attacks.

While lone wolf events are not new in the realm of terrorism, the wave of recent ISIS-inspired attacks has clearly proven the actions of an individual, operating autonomously, can conduct a successful attack, perhaps with even more lethality than a traditional planned event conducted by a terrorist cell-in-waiting. The shooting attack at Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida, represents perhaps the most visible example of lone wolf terrorism in furtherance of extremist ideology – and all without material support from any group. Examples of lone wolf terrorism perpetrated in both the U.S. and abroad abound in recent years, and arguably provide potential attackers with incentive and motivation to carry out like-minded and similar attacks using means that are readily available, increasingly without the use of firearms or explosives as primary weapons.

### Portrait of a Lone Wolf Terrorist

Individual or "lone wolf" terrorists share many characteristics with individuals who carry out active shooter incidents: they are in some way alienated from society; they have a specific grievance relating to some aspect of their current life; and there may be a degree of a psychological disorder.

There are also differences: lone wolf terrorists' actions have an ideological component, which creates connections and networks that could be traceable; they may exhibit behavioral changes that are noticeable to concerned family members as they absorb their ideology and proclaim its virtues; their targeting is less random than many active shooters; and they may have access to more dangerous weapons.

### Simplified Tactics Make Detection Even Harder

Just as the aviation industry, involving both the public and private sectors, was forced to adapt to fix systemic vulnerabilities exposed by the attacks of 9/11, so too are Western states confronted by a new necessity: protecting public venues from simple, domestically-generated lone wolf attacks. Vehicle ramming attacks, such as those perpetrated in Nice, France (July 2016), Columbus, Ohio (November 2016), and Berlin, Germany (December 2016), made clear not only the potential for mass casualty attacks, but also the inherent vulnerabilities of popular public open spaces where crowds have gathered (see Table 1, next page).

Like vehicle attacks, in which the primary weapon is both legal and readily available, stabbings do not require firearms—and the risks of exposure the acquisitions of these can entail in the pre-attack phase—in order to inflict significant numbers of casualties. Two ISIS-inspired attacks in 2016—a mass

stabbing in September 2016 at a Minnesota mall, in which nine people were wounded, and an attack at Ohio State University in November 2016 in which 11 were hospitalized after a man drove his car into a crowd and stabbed people—demonstrated how quickly an attack can occur and how hard they would have been to stop.

### Planning and Preparation are Key

With simple, lone wolf attacks likely to increase in frequency in the near- to mid-term, and the difficulty in disrupting them before they occur, citizens in all critical infrastructure sectors should plan ahead and be prepared for vehicular breaches and simple attacks. Reinforcing a building's physical security and access is a simple step toward protecting a company's, agency's, or organization's people.

**"Terrorist attacks against bars, restaurants, and nightclubs worldwide highlight [the] importance of public and private sector partnerships."**

- National Counterterrorism Center, January 2017

In addition, developing an active threat plan, communicating it to one's workforce and customers, and practicing it—like fire drills—is paramount in protecting people and infrastructure in the face of potential hazards. Public-private sector partnerships can be instrumental in accomplishing these goals.

**Table 1. Selected Vehicular and Stabbing Attacks, 2014-16**

<i>DATE</i>	<i>LOCATION</i>	<i>TYPE OF ATTACK</i>
2016	Nice, France	Ramming and gunfire
2016	Columbus, Ohio	Ramming and stabbing
2016	Berlin, Germany	Ramming
2016	Sydney, Australia	Stabbing (ISIS-inspired)
2016	Wurzburg, Germany	Stabbing (ISIS-inspired)
2016	St. Cloud, Minnesota	Stabbing (ISIS-inspired)
2015	Saint-Quentin-Fallavier (Lyon), France	Ramming gas cylinders and decapitating
2014	Jerusalem	Ramming
2014	Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, Canada	Ramming uniformed soldiers
2014	Jerusalem	Ramming
2014	West Bank	Failed ramming and stabbing
2014	Dijon, France	Ramming
2014	Nantes, France	Ramming
2014	Kunming, China	Stabbing (allegedly Uyghur separatists)

### Definitions of Terrorism in U.S. Code

18 U.S.C. § 2331 defines "international terrorism" and "domestic terrorism" for purposes of Chapter 113B of the U.S. Code, entitled "Terrorism."

#### "International terrorism" means activities with the following three characteristics:

- Involve violent acts or acts dangerous to human life that violate federal or state law;
- Appear to be intended (i) to intimidate or coerce a civilian population; (ii) to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or (iii) to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping; and
- Occur primarily outside the territorial jurisdiction of the U.S., or transcend national boundaries in terms of the means by which they are accomplished, the persons they appear intended to intimidate or coerce, or the locale in which their perpetrators operate or seek asylum.

#### "Domestic terrorism" means activities with the following three characteristics:

- Involve acts dangerous to human life that violate federal or state law;
- Appear intended (i) to intimidate or coerce a civilian population; (ii) to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or (iii) to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping; and
- Occur primarily within the territorial jurisdiction of the U.S.

Source: FBI:  
<https://www.fbi.gov/investigate/terrorism>

## 5 THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT TERRORISM

### #1

“Lone Wolf” actions have replaced traditional, organized, group-based attacks as the primary terrorist threat at home and in most Western nations.

### #2

Simplified attacks have replaced complex tactics to produce large numbers of casualties using readily available and legal means, such as vehicles and knives.

### #3

Successful lone wolf attacks are often lauded by ISIS via social media, both feeding and expanding terrorist propaganda efforts.

### #4

Mental health and other personal issues often drive solitary actors, who may or may not share ideological beliefs with ISIS or other terrorist groups to whom they claim allegiance before, during, or after an attack.

### #5

Primary targets today focus on “soft” locations where large numbers of civilians are concentrated and security is not perceived as robust.

## *Around the Nation...*

### *Colorado*

The Hanover School District board approved a measure in December to allow teachers and administrators to carry weapons on school campuses with proper training. The rural district, located about 30 miles southeast of Colorado Springs, shares an armed school resource officer with four other school districts. Proponents of the move cited the length of time—about 20 minutes—for law enforcement officers to arrive to respond to an event as a key motivator for the decision.

### *Mississippi*

The state’s Senate Judiciary Committee in late January passed a bill making attacks targeting law enforcement, firefighters, or emergency medical technicians a hate crime—leading to potentially tougher penalties under the state’s hate crime laws. Louisiana passed a similar law in 2016. At least 27 states have a “Blue Alert” system, similar to Amber Alerts, in place to warn law enforcement officers about potential threats. A national-level Blue Alert program bill passed Congress in 2015, but has yet to be implemented.

### *Virginia*

The House of Delegates in late January passed a bill allowing retired law enforcement officers working as school resource officers to carry firearms on duty. Gov. Terry McAuliffe vetoed similar legislation in April 2016, citing concerns about training and certification. The current bill, which addresses the governor’s concerns, is likely to pass the state Senate on its way to the governor’s desk.

## ABOUT KGH

KGH is a customer-focused, global, law-enforcement and national-security consulting firm that provides ***tailored solutions to complex challenges*** using end-to-end problem-solving approaches focused on information—the raw material of the intelligence and law enforcement professions.

KGH provides operational and analytic expertise by and for practitioners across the homeland security, defense, and intelligence community enterprises. KGH provides analysis for risk identification and mitigation, and to understand the often invisible interdependencies across, between and among all elements of the nation’s critical infrastructure and the criticality of public-private partnering to protect and sustain infrastructure against threats, both natural and manmade.

