



Using Edged Weapons in Active Assailant Attacks

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Throughout history terrorists have employed a variety of weapons and devices in their warfare, primarily involving firearms and improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Over the past several years, with such weapons becoming increasingly difficult for lone wolf terrorists to obtain and train to use, they have been encouraged by their terrorist groups to resort to simpler weapons and devices that are easier to acquire and use in their attacks. This article examines the use of edged weapons in their terrorist arsenal, as illustrated by significant incidents in which they were used in their attacks.

Definition

Edged weapons are defined as sharp, handheld objects that are used to inflict physical damage by an attacker against a victim, to include knives (including folding knives), **bayonets, working blades and cutting tools such as machetes, as well as swords.**

Motivation

Edged weapons have recently been promoted by Jihadi terrorist groups, with their leaders and preachers calling on their adherents to take up whatever weapons and devices that might be at their disposal to attack their adversaries. In the case of using edged weapons in terrorist attacks, these weaponized devices have supplanted firearm shootings, suicide bombings, vehicular attacks and planting improved explosive devices (IEDs) as a 'weapon of choice' for waging jihad. Through sermons in social media, online magazines and blogs, and other communications media venues, the message is that 'anyone can pick up a knife and advance the cause.' In such a way, Jihadi groups such as ISIS, issue statements urging their adherents to 'use your cars, use your kitchen knives, use all of these types of things' in terrorist attacks.

Significant Incidents

As demonstrated by the incidents listed below, edged weapons have been used in a variety of types of attacks. These range from catastrophic, mass casualty attacks such as al Qaida's 9/11 attacks, to what are termed "household terrorism" attacks in which kitchen knives are used to inflict several casualties. Also, as these incidents demonstrate, there has been an escalation in the use of edged weapons in terrorist attacks since September 2014, when ISIS emerged to become a significant jihadi terrorist group.

September 11, 2001: In a coordinated, simultaneous series of attacks, 19 al Qaida terrorists, divided into four cells, used box cutter-type knives to overcome the crews of four aircraft to use them to crash into the two World Trade Center towers and the Pentagon, with the fourth plane diverted into a crash landing in Pennsylvania. At the time, pocket utility knives with less than 4-

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inch blades were allowed on board aircraft, with this vulnerability exploited by the hijackers to enable them to by-pass airport security checkpoints.

September 25, 2014: Alton Nolen, 30, a Muslim convert who had been fired from the Vaughan Food processing plant, in Moore, Oklahoma, beheaded a female employee and then attacked another female employee with a kitchen knife. He was shot by a security guard who critically wounded him. Nolen had previous been in prison for drug charges. The knifing rampage occurred following the release of an ISIS beheading video.

October 23, 2014: Zale H. Thompson, 32, attempted to stab four New York City police officers with a metal hatchet, wounding two of them. The two officers who were not hit then shot and killed him. Thompson, a Muslim convert who had expressed jihadi sentiments in extremist websites, had been discharged from the Navy for misconduct and then had a criminal record in California.

November 5, 2015: Faisal Mohammad, 18, a freshman engineering student at University of California at Merced, in the San Joaquin Valley, used a large hunting knife to stab and wound two students, a teacher, and a construction worker. He was shot and killed by the responding police as he ran from the two-story classroom building where his stabbing spree began.

February 2016: Mohamed Barry, 30, used a machete to stab diners at the Nazareth Mediterranean Restaurant, in Columbus, Ohio, wounding four people. Barry had immigrated to the United States in 2000 from the Republic of Guinea, West Africa, and the restaurant where the attack took place was owned by an Arab Christian who had immigrated to the U.S. from Israel.

September 17, 2016: Dahir Ahmad Adan, 20, used a military-style knife to stab shoppers at the Crossroads Mall in St. Cloud, Minnesota, wounding 10 people.

November 28, 2016: Abdul Ali Artan, 18, used his vehicle to run over a crowd of students at Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, and then got out of his vehicle and used a butcher knife to stab additional victims, with 11 people wounded in total.

November 12, 2017: Mahad Abdiaziz Adbiraham, 20, used a knife to stab two men at the Mall of America, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He had reportedly carried out the stabbings on behalf of ISIS.

Assessment

For terrorist groups, in general, and for lone-wolf perpetrators, they will use whatever weapons or tools they have at their disposal to gain notoriety for their cause. With improvised explosive devices (IEDs) difficult to manufacture and ensure they will detonate reliably, and with firearms and ammunition difficult to purchase legally or even to obtain illicitly, just like commercial or consumer vehicles, there are several advantages for using an edged weapon in a

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terrorist attack. In some attacks, edged weapons are used as secondary weapons in attacks that initially use vehicles to ram into crowds.

In other advantages, considered 'low-tech' terrorism, in this type of "household terrorism," such 'weaponized' knives can be easily purchased at a store or from a kitchen drawer. It is also difficult to predict their occurrence and hard to control or restrict their use. Their use also involves little funding, planning, and gaining access to their defenseless victims in such open areas.

Finally, knifing attacks generally occur domestically because Western governments (especially the United States) have made it difficult for would-be-jihadists to travel overseas and join their terrorist groups in countries such as Syria, so such adherents are encouraged to carry out their attacks in their home countries.

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