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# BRIC Homeland Security Bulletin

## Terror Attacks on Entertainment Venues

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### (U//NP) SCOPE

Several recent incidents underline the possibility that soft targets, including entertainment venues such as bars and restaurants, are increasingly chosen over hard targets that may hold more significance to the victims and the attacking person or group. Using analysis of recent events and data from the START Global Terrorism Database, the BRIC completed the following study to raise awareness regarding the targeting of entertainment venues by violent extremist groups.<sup>1</sup>

### (U//NP) OVERVIEW

The 13 November 2015 Paris attack materialized recent messaging by violent extremist groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) that **emphasizes attacks against targets of opportunity**. ISIL propaganda openly encourages sympathizers to strike wherever possible with whatever means the attacker has available to him or her. Entertainment venues, bars, and restaurants can be found everywhere in the US and are publicly accessible or lightly defended, making them a logical choice for a would-be attacker inspired by this type of propaganda.

Though most attacks against entertainment venues during the time period studied in this analysis (1990-2014) were committed by violent Islamist groups such as al-Qa'ida and its affiliates, it should be noted that **extremist groups and individuals motivated by a number of distinct ideologies have also selected entertainment venues as targets**. Irish Republican Army (IRA) attacks in the UK and the American anti-abortion extremist group Army of God illustrate the different motivations of terrorist groups that have chosen to target bars, restaurants, and other lightly secured places where people gather.

Though North America and Western Europe have seen lower numbers of entertainment venue attacks in recent years, there is concern several factors may increase the vulnerability of these locations. Extensive media attention given to recent attacks such as the November attack in Paris, the prevalence of terrorist propaganda suggesting these venues as targets, and the prevalence of frequent smaller attacks committed by inspired groups and individuals all suggest that **entertainment venues are likely to be considered as potential targets by violent extremist groups in the near future**.



People gather to pay their respects at one of the locations of the 13 November Paris attacks [Source](#)

### (U//NP) ANALYSIS

This analysis used data from 1990 to 2014 from the START Global Terrorism Database. Analysts chose to limit the years studied to 1990-2014 to focus on more recent trends.

<sup>1</sup> The START Global Terrorism Database is an open-source database based at the University of Maryland that tracks terrorist events around the world. It has been used by the US Department of State and the Department of Homeland Security to conduct research, and it is also published online at [www.start.umd.edu](http://www.start.umd.edu). The Database has its own definition for what it records as a terrorist attack, including that the incident must be intentionally committed by a non-state actor and intended to coerce, intimidate, or convey a message. The BRIC used data from 1990-2014 for the purposes of this study (2015 data is not yet available). This database defines entertainment venues to include: bars, restaurants, cafes, entertainment centers, cultural centers, stadiums, and casinos. Some incidents that may otherwise be considered attacks on entertainment venues were classified as attacks on tourists, suggesting this number is likely on the low side. In the data from 1990-2014, START categorized 222 incidents as an attack on tourists.

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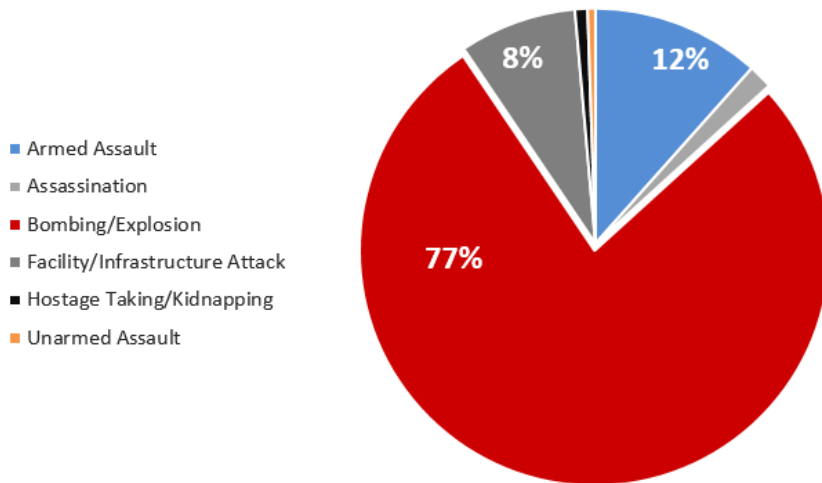
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From 1990-2014, the Database recorded **100,964 total terror attacks** throughout the world. Of those attacks, 1,510 were on entertainment venues.<sup>2</sup>

**Tactics**

Of all attacks on entertainment venues worldwide from 1990-2014 recorded by START, bombings were by far the most common tactic used by the perpetrators, followed by armed assault. In looking at “successful” bomb attacks (meaning the bomb went off as intended), approximately 2 people were killed on average in each attack.<sup>3 4</sup> When considering this number it

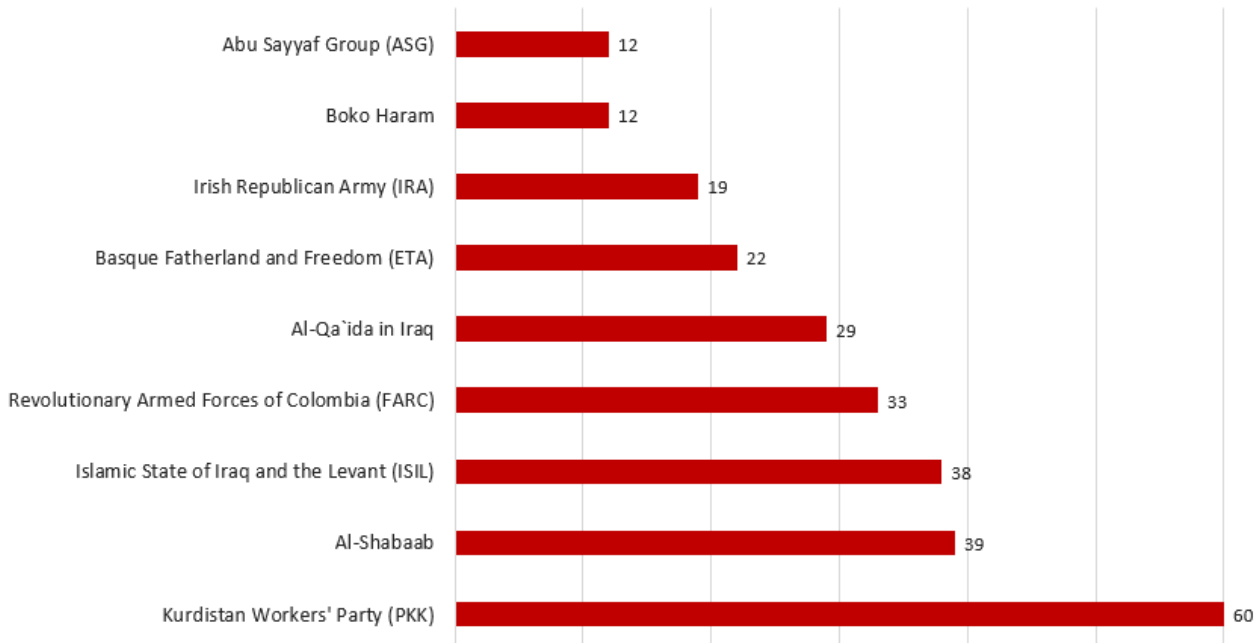
**Types of Attacks on Entertainment Venues**



is important to remember there are many different types of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), some far more lethal than others. For example, though a suicide bomber can often get closer to his or her targets undetected, suicide vests carry a smaller payload and do not always result in significant casualties. In most situations, when attempting to secret an IED into an entertainment venue, there is a limit to how large and unwieldy the IED can be made before it is noticed by those nearby. Additionally, it takes a certain level of knowledge and skill to build a bomb that can be relatively easily concealed and that will inflict a large amount of damage.

**Terrorist Groups**

**Attacks on Entertainment Venues by Group**



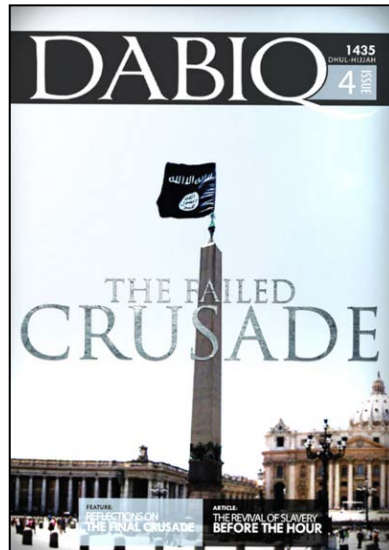
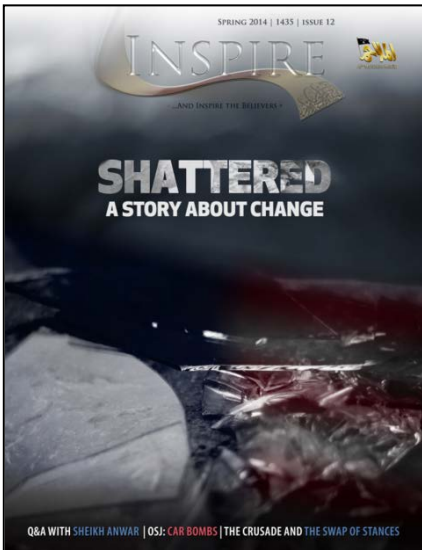
<sup>2</sup> There were 3 incidents classified as tourist attacks in the US during this time period. A notable exclusion (though not in the US) is the 2002 Bali nightclub bombing, which killed over 200 Western tourists – it may have been classified as targeting tourists due to motivations later cited by people involved in the attack.

<sup>3</sup> This figure does not include the Bali nightclub bombing as START classified this incident as an attack on tourists, not the venue itself. This would likely result in a higher average as over 200 people were killed in this attack.

<sup>4</sup> Two people excluding the attacker.

The PKK, al-Shabaab, and ISIL are the groups that committed the most attacks on entertainment venues during the time period studied.<sup>5</sup> The inclusion of ISIL (aka Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) is especially significant given that the group as it stands now has only been in existence since the summer of 2014 – in a little over six months, the group was almost as prolific as al-Shabaab, which has been in existence since 2006 and allied with al-Qa’ida since approximately 2010. Additionally, al-Qa’ida in Iraq was ISIL’s predecessor – ISIL split from al-Qa’ida and took on a new name in summer 2014 – adding AQI’s attacks to ISIL’s would make the group even more prolific.

### Propaganda



Many violent extremist groups intending to cause mass casualties have encouraged the targeting of entertainment venues in their propaganda. Some point out locations at which a specific clientele is likely to gather, whereas others seek only to indiscriminately kill a large number of people. Though law enforcement has long been aware of the vulnerability of mass gatherings (e.g. concerts, sporting events), the subsequent hardening of many of these targets may lead to a turn to softer targets where large groups gather, such as bars and restaurants.

*Inspire* magazine, published by AQAP, suggests entertainment venues as targets in issues released in 2011, 2013, and 2014. AQAP writers include nightclubs, shopping malls, financial centers, and tourist locations as places to conduct an attack. *Dabiq*, published by ISIL militants, emphasized simple, small-scale attacks in their October 2014 issue, prioritizing the frequency and feasibility of attacks over the significance of the target.

Both groups have at one time or another reassured would-be attackers that smaller attacks matter as much to their mission as larger operations. ISIL in particular has encouraged sympathizers to commit violence against nonbelievers in any way they can, and the group is quick to praise any individual suspected of committing violence on the group’s behalf. Many of the individuals arrested in the US and charged with ISIL-related terror offenses originally had grander plans, but scaled back when they realized their initial plot was beyond their reach.

*“General targets: places flooded with individuals... the important thing is that you target people and not buildings. Specific targets: areas and restaurants with high profile personalities...” Inspire, Issue 12*

*“...the citizens of crusader nations should be targeted wherever they can be found.”*  
Dabiq, Issue 4

*“Small operations occupy the enemy’s time. Hitting him in his backyard drives him crazy. So these small operations of today, are the stepping stone of tomorrow’s victory, by the Grace of Allah.” Inspire, Issue 10*

### (U//NP) RECENT TRENDS IN ATTACKS ON ENTERTAINMENT VENUES

Attacks on entertainment venues spiked in the Middle East and North Africa in 2013 and remained at elevated levels for 2014. Reverberating effects from the Arab Spring in 2011 partially contributed to unrest in these regions, which experienced significant disruptions in 2013. The Syrian Civil War, the military coup against Mohammed Morsi in Egypt, and infighting in Libya all have roots in conflicts that came to the surface during the uprisings of 2011. Terrorist groups are able to operate more freely in countries that lack a strong government able to enforce rule of law, and many Middle Eastern countries were left with infighting after authoritarian leaders were overthrown during the Arab Spring, including Hosni Mubarak in Egypt and Muammar Gaddafi in Libya.

<sup>5</sup> The vast majority of the attacks recorded were committed by attackers who were never identified.

Another region recently experiencing a rise in the frequency of these types of attacks is Sub-Saharan Africa, which has experienced an increase activity from various terrorist groups. Groups operating in this region include al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb in Mali, Boko Haram in Nigeria, and al-Shabaab in Somalia and Kenya. The same can be said of South Asia, which includes Afghanistan and Pakistan - both countries have experienced a recent resurgence in violence conducted by groups connected to the Taliban following the draw down of US troops in Afghanistan.

**Regions with Highest Number of Entertainment Venue Attacks - 1990-2014**

Middle East & North Africa	519
Western Europe	259
South Asia	159
Sub-Saharan Africa	152
Southeast Asia	151

Western Europe has consistently suffered a higher number of attacks on entertainment venues than North America, though this number has been declining since 1995.<sup>6</sup> The spike in the 1990s is due in large part to acts committed by groups linked to the IRA and the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK), both of which were very active in their areas of operation during this time. Violence committed by the IRA slowed after the Good Friday agreements of 1998, and various splinter groups have largely disarmed since this time. A truce announced by PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan in 2013 contributed to a slowdown in activity, though the group became more active in late 2015 and early 2016 after the dissolution of the ceasefire with the Turkish government. Recent PKK targets are primarily affiliated with law enforcement or the Turkish military.

North America experienced the highest number of attacks in 1997. In one, Eric Rudolph, a member of the anti-abortion extremist group Army of God, targeted a gay bar in Atlanta by placing one bomb on the outdoor patio and the second in the parking lot, timed to target first responders. The first bomb injured five, and the second was deactivated by the responding bomb squad. Rudolph was also responsible for the Olympic Park bombing in 1996.



(Left) Materials used in the bombs left at the Otherside Lounge

Though North America and Western Europe have shown consistently lower numbers of entertainment venue attacks since the 1990s, several recent attacks illustrate that locations of little symbolic significance may be increasingly chosen as targets. Additionally, the hardening of other possible vulnerable locations such as sporting events may drive would-be attackers to suggest locations that still draw large crowds but have less intense security.

**(U//NP) CASE STUDIES**

**Paris Attacks – 13 November 2015**

Over approximately 30 minutes, 9 suspects, working in teams of three, attacked a stadium, a restaurant district, and a concert hall. The attackers, who wore suicide vests and carried Kalashnikovs, killed 130 people and injured hundreds of others. Seven of the attackers died from detonation of their suicide vests during the attack, and two were killed in a later raid. All of the gunmen were later determined to have trained with ISIL in Syria.

Three of the attackers attempted to get into the Stade de France, which was hosting a soccer match with approximately 80,000 people in attendance. They detonated their vests when they were denied entry.

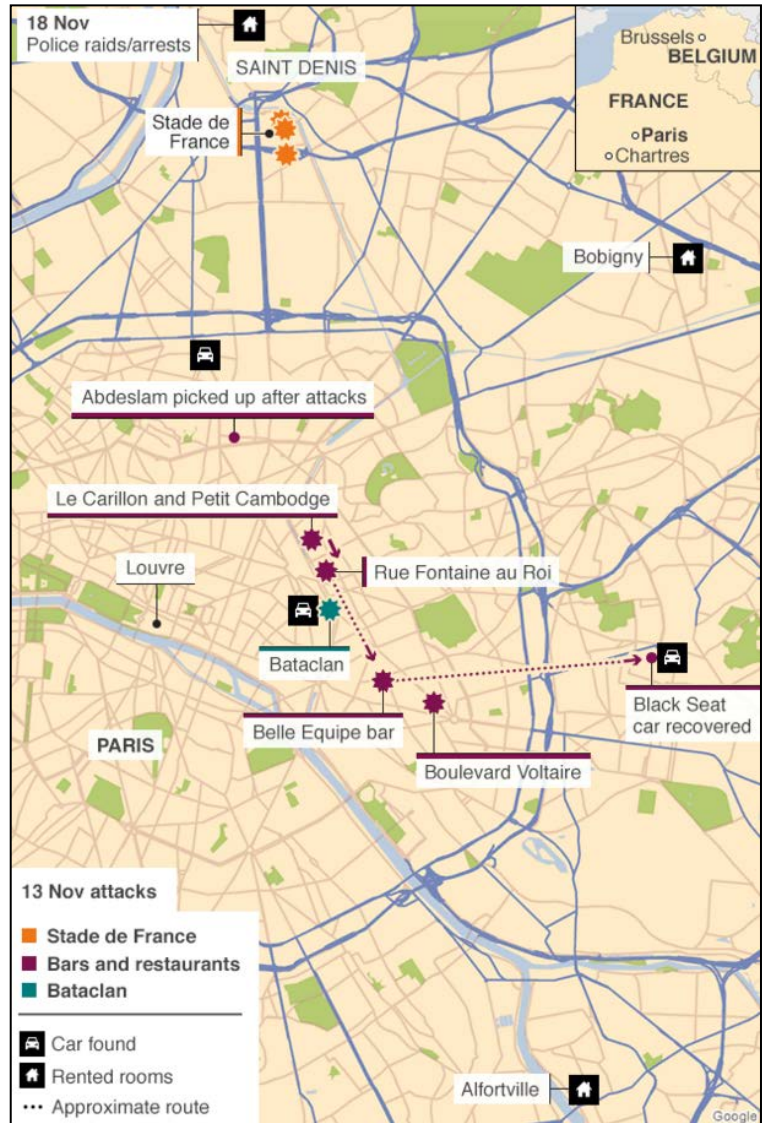
<sup>6</sup> North America includes the US, Mexico, and Canada.

Another group attacked heavily populated restaurants, shooting indiscriminately. Many people were sitting at sidewalk tables, as the evening was unseasonably warm. At one of the restaurants, 19 people were shot and killed.

The three remaining attackers stormed the Bataclan Theatre, where hundreds of people were gathered for a concert. One attacker stood guard while the others executed concertgoers. A police raid stopped the attackers – two detonated their vests and the third was killed by police gunfire. A total of 89 people were killed in the theatre.

Paris Attack Key Points:

- *Targets and timing selected in order to maximize casualties*
- *Several of the attackers likely conducted preoperational surveillance of locations*
- *Casualties would have been much greater had security been more lax at the stadium*
- *Targets held little symbolic significance*



[Source](#)

**Rochester New Year’s Eve Plot – December 2015**

Emanuel Lutchman, 25, was arrested on 30 December and charged with plotting to carry out a knife attack on diners at a restaurant in Rochester, NY on New Year’s Eve. Lutchman is alleged to have pledged allegiance to ISIL in addition to telling a confidential FBI informant that he communicated with an ISIL militant abroad.

Lutchman, who also considered traveling to Syria to join the group, started with plans to make a pressure cooker bomb, but scaled back due to a lack of knowledge and resources. Along with an informant, he bought ski masks, a machete, zip ties, and duct tape. He chose his date and target with the intention of killing as many people as possible, and recorded a video claiming responsibility for the attack. Lutchman was described as a recent convert to Islam with a history of petty crime. He reportedly had significant mental health issues, which is not uncommon among US persons charged with ISIL-related offenses.

Rochester Plot Key Points:

- *Target picked for accessibility, possibility for mass casualties, and lack of security*
- *Target held little symbolic significance*
- *Original plan was scaled back when perpetrator encountered difficulties*

## (U//NP) OUTLOOK

Entertainment venues have always been a desirable target for violent extremist groups for a number of reasons. For violent Islamist extremist groups, many venues that fall in this category are representative of Western values and way of life that they wish to abolish and replace with their archaic interpretation of Islamic law. For groups motivated to violence by other ideologies, they represent a “target of opportunity” – minimally secured locations where crowds are likely to gather, thus increasing the possibility of causing mass casualties.

The openness of many of these locations that makes them appealing to ordinary citizens makes them vulnerable to attacks. Would-be attackers can easily become familiar with these venues if they know the area, and would easily know which are popular with a particular target group.

While we have no specific intelligence indicating that groups or individuals wish to target entertainment venues in the MBHSR, **the extensive media attention given to recent attacks, the prevalence of violent extremist propaganda suggesting particular targets, and the trend towards smaller attacks committed by inspired groups and individuals increases the vulnerability of entertainment venues.** Additionally, in several recent incidents, including the Paris attacks, the attackers likely conducted some pre-operational surveillance, suggesting that there may have been missed opportunities to alert law enforcement about potential suspicious activity. The BRIC encourages law enforcement and private sector security partners to remain cognizant of this trend and adjust their security procedures accordingly. Please continue reporting suspicious activity to the BRIC at [BRIC@PD.BOSTON.GOV](mailto:BRIC@PD.BOSTON.GOV) or 617-343-4328.