

Fred Burton of Stratfor has long written on "lone wolf" attacks. This was his first reaction an hour ago to the murder of a policeman and passers by at Westminster.

It's easy for grassroots attackers to conduct simple but effective headline-grabbing attacks using readily available weapons, especially if they are willing to die in the process. The vehicle used here wasn't nearly as large as the ones used in the much deadlier attacks in Nice and Berlin. We've noted vehicle assaults and knife attacks are a simple and effective asymmetrical grassroots tactic. This incident, which got high-profile headlines and disrupted the British capital, will likely inspire similar attacks.

## THE EVENT

Four people were killed (a fifth died later in hospital) — including the attacker and one police officer — and 20 others were injured in a March 22 vehicular assault/knife attack on Westminster Bridge and near the Houses of Parliament.

## TACTICS

A few things now seem clear, but keep in mind we are in the initial stages of a fluid, fast-moving story, which always requires circumspection of the reader

The attacker drove a Hyundai Tucson over Westminster Bridge towards Parliament, striking several people including three police officers. He hit several more pedestrians on the other side of the bridge before crashing into a gate near Parliament. The attacker then sprinted from the vehicle, knife in hand, into Old Palace Yard where he was tackled by an unarmed police officer, whom he stabbed. That officer later died from his wounds. A second officer shot the attacker, who also later died. The area was put under security lockdown.

Parliament was in session with a vote in progress, which meant the full legislature was in the building. The Prime Minister and Chancellor were evacuated to a secure location, but the

evacuation of Parliament was held up while the bomb squad checked a suspicious package in the vehicle. Later in the day it was reported that the Prime Minister would chair a meeting of the COBRA committee - named after the room in the Cabinet Office in Whitehall where it is held, so the evacuation was clearly a temporary measure.

The attacker was at first wrongly identified in major media reports as British citizen Abu Izzadeen — born Trevor Brooks — but those reports were quickly heavily contested, including by his brother. We saw a similar pattern in the Ft. Lauderdale airport attack when some major outlets misidentified the shooter - an exemplar of the pressure of live continuous news coverage of incidents where confusion is endemic ("the fog of war" on the streets of London). Police later named the perpetrator as Khalid Masood, 52, who converted from Adrian Elms.

## TRENDS

The tactics are similar to the November 2016 attack in Columbus, Ohio, where a man attempted to run people down with his car before emerging with a knife and stabbing several others. This London attack took place on the first anniversary of the Brussels airport bombing

## IMPLICATIONS

It's easy for grassroots attackers to conduct simple but effective headline-grabbing attacks using readily available weapons, especially if they are willing to die in the process. A Hyundai Tucson isn't nearly as large as the vehicles used in the much deadlier attacks in Nice and Berlin but no one could have been able to get a large truck into that part of London at that hour. This attacker was also unable to penetrate building security like the attacker did in the October 2014 attack in Ottawa, being held back by the ornate but substantial cast iron gates of Parliament.

We've before noted that vehicle assaults and knife attacks are a simple and effective asymmetrical grassroots tactic, and incident, which got high-profile headlines and disrupted the British capital, will likely inspire similar attacks.

Postscript : An incredibly timely report from the Henry Jackson Society on foreign terrorist

attacksÂ <http://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/FINAL-Foreign-Terrorist-Attacks-Paper.pdf>

The report's key findings are especially notable:

\* In the majority of cases, terrorism in the name of the Islamic State outside of its so-called caliphate was either controlled or guided by the organisation;

\* Very rarely, just 15% of cases, were Islamic State attacks "lone wolf" attacks. Even when the Islamic State was not directly guiding or directing plots, terrorists were often supported by a network.

Other important findings were:

\* External attacks by the Islamic State movement date back to at least 2002 - the organisation having been founded in 1999 - and are therefore not solely a response to the loss of territory as its so-called caliphate is rolled back;

\* At least 34 states have been attacked by the Islamic State, with the top five most victimised countries being: France, the United States, Germany, Turkey and Australia

The frequency and lethality of the Islamic State's foreign terrorist attacks are increasing.

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Many of the attacks claimed by the Islamic State have been referred to as "lone wolf" attacks, but these results show that in the majority of cases this is false: these are attacks by a foreign adversary. This is important for crafting counter-terrorism policy going forward. Among other

things, the report demonstrates that depriving the Islamic State of territorial holdings does not diminish its international appeal, which had been a key assumption of the current campaign against the Islamic State.