

# Terrorism Is Booming Almost Everywhere But in the United States

[foreignpolicy.com/2015/06/19/terrorism-is-booming-almost-everywhere-but-in-the-united-states-state-department-report/](http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/06/19/terrorism-is-booming-almost-everywhere-but-in-the-united-states-state-department-report/)

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LONDON, ENGLAND - JANUARY 08: Armed British Transport Police officers patrol the Eurostar platforms at St Pancras railway station on January 8, 2015 in London, United Kingdom. France is on maximum security threat level after twelve people were killed, including two police officers, at the offices of the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo in Paris. (Photo by Peter Macdiarmid/Getty Images)

On June 19, the U.S. State Department published its [Country Reports on Terrorism: 2014](#) — the department’s annual, congressionally mandated analytical and statistical review of global terrorism. Since the concept of [terrorism](#) is open to subjective interpretation and politically motivated misrepresentation, it is important to note that, since 1983, the U.S. government has used the same definition for statistical analytical purposes, which is based in [Title 22](#) of the U.S. Code, Section 2656f(d):

*(2) the term “terrorism” means premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents...*

*“non-combatant,” which is referred to but not defined in 22 USC 2656f(d)(2), is interpreted to mean, in addition to civilians, military personnel (whether or not armed or on duty) who are not deployed in a war zone or a war-like setting.*

With that relatively limited definition of terrorism in mind, there are five significant findings that stand out from the latest report.

First, the phenomenon of terrorism has significantly worsened, in terms of the number of attacks, their lethality, as well as the size of terrorist organizations. The number of attacks increased 39 percent from 9,707 in 2013 to 13,463 last year. There were 17,891 fatalities in 2013, growing 83 percent to 32,727 in 2014. To give you a fuller sense of how vastly contemporary terrorism has grown, just a little over a dozen years ago, in 2002, only 725 people were killed worldwide. During President Barack Obama's first full year in office, in 2010, it was 13,186. In other words, terrorist-related deaths grew by more than 4,000 percent from 2002 and by 148 percent from 2010 to 2014.

The size of several groups grew in strength, in particular the self-declared Islamic State, which was estimated to include both between 1,000 and 2,000 members in Iraq and a "significant portion" of the 26,000 extremist fighters in Syria in 2013, and grew in strength to between 20,000 and 31,500 fighters in 2014. Boko Haram also expanded from "hundreds to a few thousand" to "several thousand" fighters. In addition, there were 33 new organizations identified as perpetrators of terrorist attacks in 2014, indicating that more groups are forming to employ this deadly tactic.

Second, reflecting what scholars and experts have long known, terrorism predominantly is a driving component of interstate warfare or transregional conflict. Some 63 percent of all attacks occurred in just six countries: Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan, India, Nigeria, and Syria. Unsurprisingly, these are also countries characterized by chronic state fragility, deep and widespread dissatisfaction with political leadership, and nonstate actors with the resources and motivation to target noncombatants with lethal force in an effort to achieve some set of clinical objectives. These shared underlying conditions explain why many scholars keep arguing (largely in vain) that any enduring defeat of terrorism requires a conflict prevention, peace building, and development approach, rather than the same set "counterterrorism" principles.

#### About the Author

Third, even with these worsening trends, terrorism still represents only a small fraction of overall violent deaths. The annual number of violent deaths worldwide is 508,000, according to the Global Burden of Armed Violence 2015: Every Body Counts report. In other words, less than 7 percent of violent deaths are a result of acts of terrorism. Compare the 32,727 terrorist fatalities to the estimated 377,000 people who were killed, collectively, in interpersonal violence, gang violence, or economically motivated crimes. Citizens of several Central American and Caribbean countries are still more likely to be the victim of homicide than Iraqis or Syrians are from terrorism.



Fourth, readers of the State Department report should know that there have always been disagreements with the methodologies employed. In 2003, under the leadership of its then-director John Brennan, the Terrorist Threat Integration Center provided wildly inaccurate data to the CIA, which was then incorporated into the State Department report. The TTIC found there had been 307 fatalities, but after Secretary of State Colin Powell directed an exhaustive re-examination of the evidence, the total amount grew by 104 percent to 725. More recently, the Chicago Project on Security and Terrorism charged that the current compilers of the State Department's statistics, the University of Maryland's National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, undercounted the violence during the Iraq War, which subsequently makes the recent increase in violence "more extreme than it really is."

Finally, terrorism continues to pose an extremely small threat to the United States and its citizens. The number of Americans killed by international terrorism grew over the past year from 16 to 24. However, this is still fewer than the average number that has tragically been killed each year since 9/11, which is 28. Moreover, not one U.S. citizen died from terrorism within the United States last year. Rather, as has been consistent with previous years, Americans die from terrorism when they travel to war zones, or areas marked by violent instability: Of the 24 deaths

last year, 10 were in Afghanistan, 5 in Israel or the Occupied Territories, 3 in Somali, 3 in Syria, and 1 a piece in Egypt and the United Arab Emirates.

See the chart below to visualize how relatively safe Americans are from terrorism when compared to the rest of the world. At today's press briefing on the findings of the report, [Tina Kaidanow](#), ambassador-at-large and coordinator for counterterrorism at the State Department, pointed out that "numbers don't tell the whole story." Truly numbers never do, and they are always contested, but they should be understood by the interested public, and ideally serve as the basis for public policy responses to this ever worsening global challenge.

Photo credit: Peter Macdiarmid/Getty Images News

Corrections, June 24, 2015: The number of terrorist attacks increased 39 percent from 2013 to 2014; an earlier version of this article mistakenly said they increased 35 percent. The number of fatalities from terrorist attacks increased 83 percent from 2013 to 2014; an earlier version of this article mistakenly said they increased 81 percent. Terrorism-related deaths increased 148 percent from 2010 to 2014; an earlier version of this article said they increased 160 percent in the past four years.